



# \$200 Brings You This 3 Piece Bedroom Outfit

## Read this Description

**Soft Cotton Comforter**—Good size, soft and thick. Filled with pure, sweet, sanitary white cotton with a good wearing blanket cover in rich floral design, both sides alike. Measures about 71 x 70 in. Weight about 5 lbs.

**Double Plaid Blankets**—Plus festive wool finished double cotton blanket. Has carefully matched plaid binding. Made with wool-like finish produced by special process. Practically as warm as all wool blankets. Superior colorings. Fits about 64 x 80 in. Weight about 3 1/4 pounds.

**Scalloped Bedspread**—Magnificently crafted. Made of a close woven fine staple New England cotton yarn. Bleached to snowflake white. Lends perfectly. Size about 71 x 70 in. Weight about 3 1/4 pounds. Comes in a set so spread will fit perfectly smooth and flat upon the bed. Overlooked with solid trim.

**2 Pair Lace Curtains**—Newest Colonial design. Made from an excellent scrim with 3 1/2 yds. lace, lacecap and daisy 1-2 inch lace ends. White only. Size 61 in. long and 23 inch wide. Will launder perfectly.

**2 Bed sheets**—Topped, extra heavy, bleached two extra whiter, nicely hemmed and beautifully finished. Size about 50 x 71 inches.

**2 Pillow Cases**—Same quality as sheets—bleached to pure snow—daisy white, nicely made and beautifully hemmed. Will give long service and will launder perfectly. Size about 12 x 20 in. Shipping weight of entire outfit about 15 pounds.

Order by No. C7282A. \$1.00 with coupon, \$2.00 a month. Price for all 9 pieces, only \$19.95.

## Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, jewelry, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, glass, talking machines, porch and lawn furniture, women's, men's and children's wearing apparel. Send coupon today (now)

Wonderful Bargain! A complete outfit of bed equipment—nine useful pieces—things you need—things every proud housewife ought to have—and the whole outfit costs you less than 50c a week, just \$2.00 a month—surely you can easily save that much on other things! Mail the coupon today and we will send you all these 9 pieces on approval.

## 30 Days Trial—Easy Payments

When you get this complete 9-piece bedroom outfit, use it freely for thirty days. See for yourself the beauty and quality of each piece. Note how the curtains and handsome bedding beautify your bedroom. Then, if not satisfied for any reason, return the set at our expense and we will refund your \$1.00 at once and any express or parcel post you paid. But if you decide to keep the set, start paying only \$2.00 a month until you have paid \$19.95—payments so low and so convenient that you will scarcely know you spent the money. Think of the value. Such an amazing bargain and your bedroom like new! If you were to buy these pieces singly they would cost you almost twice as much as we ask on this great combination offer. Could you deprecate this offer ever, anywhere for spot cash? We're amped the cash price while giving almost a year to pay. We trust honest people anywhere in the U. S. No discount for cash, nothing extra for credit. No C. O. D.

## Send NOW

Don't delay — Just send \$1.00. Remember, \$1.00 deposit; then thirty days' trial; then your \$1.00 back if not fully satisfied. You do not risk one cent — read that coupon NOW!

**Straus & Schram**  
Dept. 2278 Chicago

**Straus & Schram, Dept. 2278**  
Gentlemen:—Enclosed you will find \$1.00. Ship special advertised 9-piece Bedroom Outfit. I am to have 30 days trial. If I keep the outfit I will pay balance at \$2.00 per month. If not satisfied, I will return the outfit within 30 days and you agree to refund my dollar and any express or parcel post charges I paid. Pieces not sold separately.

☐ 9-Piece Bedroom Outfit No. C7282A. \$19.95.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
St. RFD \_\_\_\_\_  
or Box No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Shipping Point \_\_\_\_\_  
Post Office \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_  
If you want catalog only, put x in box below:  
☐ Furniture, Stoves, Jewelry ☐ Men's, Women's, Children's Clothing



*In every man's life there is one Big Moment when he makes the decision that either robs him of success—or leads on to fortune.*

# Your One Chance to Earn The Biggest Money of Your Life!

**H**AVE you ever considered why our richest men come from our poorest boys? Isn't it a strange thing that it is almost invariably a young fellow who starts life without a cent in the world, without education, without influential friends—in short, without one single solitary advantage—who accumulates millions of dollars? Isn't it a miracle that inside of a comparatively few years a man can rise from abject poverty to fabulous wealth?

## The Secret That Makes Millionaires

Astonishing, certainly—but more important, it is wonderfully inspiring. For it means that no man need be held down by circumstances. Once he knows the "millionaire's secret," he can put it into operation regardless of all obstacles that seem to block his path. He suddenly finds that everything he touches turns to gold—money flows in upon him—fortune showers him with its favors. Everything he wants seems to come to him just as surely and easily as day comes after night.

What is this amazing secret that can work such wonders? It is just this: The thing behind all big achievement is Opportunity.

To every man there comes one BIG Opportunity—the golden chance of his life. And in the moment he decides for or against that opportunity—whether he will seize it or let it pass—he decides the whole future course of his life.

## Choose Between Low Pay and Magnificent Earnings

This very minute you may be face to face with your BIG opportunity—your one chance to earn the biggest money of your life! Right now your decision may mean the difference between a life of plodding, routine work at low pay and a career of inspiring success and magnificent earnings.

For now you are offered the very opportunity that has made other men rich, that has brought them more money than they ever dreamed of earning.

It is the same opportunity that lifted Warren Hartle of Chicago out of a job in the railway mail service where in ten years he had never gotten beyond \$1,600 a year, and landed him in a \$10,000 a year job. It jumped Charles Barry of Wilkes-Barre from \$60 a month as a farm-hand, to \$1,000 a month. It brought to C. W. Campbell

of Greensburg, Pa., a clerk on the railroad, a position that paid him \$1,562 in thirty days.

These men and hundreds more have found their BIG Opportunity in the wonderful field of Salesmanship. They are all Master Salesmen now. They are earning the biggest money of their lives—more than they ever thought possible—they are engaged in the most fascinating work in the world—they are independent, come and go as they please—they meet big men—every minute of the day is filled with thrilling variety.

Your Big Opportunity may be here too, in the wonder field of Salesmanship. Perhaps you say you have never even thought of becoming a Salesman. But before you decide one way or the other, examine the facts for yourself. See what Salesmanship offers you—why it is the best paid of all vocations—why there is no limit to what you may earn. Read the amazing proof that no matter what you are doing now, you can quickly become a Master Salesman in your spare time at home—read how the National Salesmen's Training Association in its nation wide search for men to fill the great need of Salesmen, has devised a wonderful system that reveals to you every Secret of Selling without interfering in the least with your present work. See how this famous organization helps you to a good position in the line of Selling you are best fitted for.

## Facts That Will Amaze You— Sent FREE

Mail the coupon below. This will not cost you a penny—it places you under no obligation. It simply means that you will receive, entirely FREE, a wonderful, illustrated Book, "Modern Salesmanship," and Proof that you can be a Master Salesman. You will receive, also, the personal stories of men throughout the country who today are enjoying magnificent success and earning five, ten and fifteen times as much money as ever before.

Send NOW—this minute may be the turning point in your life. Address, National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 2-B, Chicago, Ill.

National Salesmen's Training Association,  
Dept. 2-B, Chicago, Ill.

I simply want to see the facts. Send me FREE your Book "Modern Salesmanship," and Proof that I can become a Master Salesman. Also tell how you can help me to a position and send list of firms with openings for Salesmen.

Name.....  
Address.....  
City..... State.....  
Age..... Occupation.....

# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

Vol. CXLVII

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In the guise of a mystic with a mission, Jaca Javalie comes to the hate-racked castle of the Bannings, in Florida, to play for the greatest prize in all creation. He is prepared for every contingency that arises, save the stunning one that comes at the moment of triumph in front of the great steel vault.

## RED DARKNESS

BY GEORGE F. WORTS

a serial in four parts, beginning next week, tells this unusual story.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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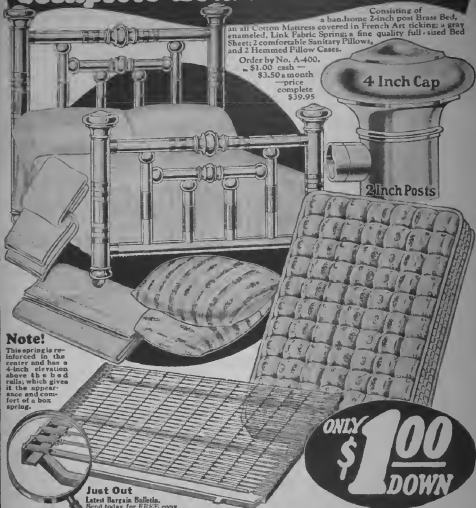
CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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# Complete Brass Bed Outfit



Consisting of a handsome 24-inch post Brass Bed, an all Cotton Mattress covered in French Art ticking; a gray enameled, Link Fabric Spring; a fine quality full-sized Bed Sheet; 2 comfortable Sanitary Pillows, and 2 Hemmed Pillow Cases.

Order by No. A-400.  
- \$1.00 cash -  
\$3.50 a month  
- price complete  
\$39.95

4 Inch Cap

2 Inch Posts

## Note!

This spring is reinforced in the center and has a 4-inch elevation above the bed rails, which gives it the appearance and comfort of a box spring.

Just Out  
Latest Bargain Bulletin.  
Send today for FREE copy.

ONLY \$1.00 DOWN

## Send Coupon 30 Days' FREE Trial - Money-Back Guarantee

THE BED is one of the handiest designs we have ever seen. It has 24 posts, 4 inch caps, 1 inch top rail and 1 inch fillers, and, beautifully ribbon banded and satin finished. Guaranteed without repair, will not tarnish or wear off. Full size 4 ft. 6 in. THE MATTRESS is a wonderfully comfortable, sanitary and durable. It is filled with selected, thoroughly sterilized cotton-covered in a superior grade of French art ticking, securely stitched and firmly tufted, full 40 pounds in weight. "WOODEN" LINK FABRIC BED SPRING is constructed of "WOODEN" LINK FABRIC, selected steel link fabric, with a 4-inch steel clip. Each link is securely locked and interlocked, the fabric is supported at each end by 22 well-tempered helical springs which produce a very resilient effect. The angle iron rails are bowed so as to give spring a 4-inch elevation. Angle rail adds greatly to the strength and durability. EXTRA STERLING BRAND PILLOWS completely selected double fluted hair cushions. Steam pressed and cured. Thoroughly clean and guaranteed perfect. Enclosed in good ticking in an attractive floral design. BED SHEET bleached, burned, woven of fine dependable yarn. PILLOW CASES to match sheet, 3 inch hem, extra high quality.

Send for this brass bed and complete outfit, see it in your own home - keep it for 30 days. All you pay is \$1.00 - not another cent - until you have tried this bed outfit in your own home for 30 days. If not satisfied return it to us and we will refund your \$1.00 and freight charges both ways. If you like it, keep it, and pay the balance in easy monthly payments if you are satisfied. We guarantee to refund your money if you are not absolutely satisfied. Send the coupon today - now.

L. Fish Furniture Company  
Dept. 1458 State, Archer and 19th Streets, Chicago

L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. 1458 State, Archer and 19th Sts., Chicago, Ill.

Enclosed had \$1.00. Ship advertised Complete Brass Bed Outfit No. A-400. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the outfit I will pay you \$3.50 a month. If not satisfied, I am to return the complete bed outfit within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.

☐ No. A-400 - \$1.00 down. \$3.50 per month. Total \$39.95.

Name.....

Address.....

Post Office..... State.....

If you only want latest bargain bulletin just issued, put X in box. ☐

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# 50¢ Down

**Special  
Price**

**No  
C.O.D.  
to  
Pay**

Brings this stunning fur trimmed velveteen dress. This garment is made of excellent quality velveteen and the waist part has a narrow vestee of fancy silk and rows of silk braid on either side extending around the neck. The sleeves have cuffs of fur. The skirt has extra wide side panels of self-material also trimmed with two rows of fur. These panels as well as belt are trimmed off with braid to match the waist part. This is one of the most charming and reasonably priced dresses we have offered our customers this season. Comes in Black, Navy Blue or Brown. Sizes 34 to 44. Same dress for stout women sizes 43 to 51.

Order by No. F-35. Terms 50¢ with coupon, \$3.35 monthly, total price \$19.95. For stout sizes order by No. F-36. Terms 50¢ with coupon, \$3.85 monthly, total price \$22.95.

## 6 Months to Pay

We want you to take advantage of our easy payment plan. Just a small payment each month. Use your credit as thousands do and save money besides. We trust honest people everywhere. Send only 50¢ with the coupon below for this latest style fur trimmed velveteen dress. Money back if you ask for it. If you are delighted with the dress and wish to keep it, you may pay the balance. Only \$3.35 a month pays for this dress. An easy and delightful way to secure a charming dress. Remember, this is a special offer. Just a limited number at this price. You must send your order now.

## Send this Coupon

### Elmer Richards Co.

Dept. 8278, W. 35th St., Chicago, Ill.

I enclose 50¢. Send dress checked below. Color.....

Best ..... Belt..... Hip..... Length.....

If I am not delighted with the dress, I can return it and get my 50¢ back. Otherwise, I will pay easy terms.

Regular ☐ F-35—\$3.35 monthly, total price, \$19.95

Stout ☐ F-36—\$3.85 monthly, total price, \$22.95

Name .....

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City ..... State.....



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Regular  
and  
Stout  
Figures**



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**SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies** write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best reputation to offer you. Act now and be convinced. **RAY HIBBELER, D-147,** 9040 Dickens Ave., Chicago.

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Common Education Sufficient  
Send Coupon Today—SURE

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Address.....

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## TEAR OUT HERE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS Box 2164-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without trip or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X

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Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

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Colds	Headache
Toothache	Rheumatism
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Neuralgia	Pain, Pain

Accept only "Bayer" package which contains proper directions.

Handy "Bayer" boxes of 12 tablets—Also bottles of 24 and 100—Druggists. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monaceticacidester of Salicylicacid

For  
Boys  
and  
Girls  
Also



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Check off at the right the use that most interests you and I will send you my booklet and personal advice.

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overcomes WEAKNESS and ORGANIC ailments of men and women. Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, health, strength and ability to do things. IT HAS HELPED NEARLY 200,000.

**Read what users say:** "Helped relieve atrocious pains and overcame permanently a spinal curvature." "Lifted me physically out of darkest depths of suffering after everything else had failed." "Gives one an upright, perfect form." "I wore it for strengthening a weak back—it certainly accomplished its purpose." "Comfortable as a dress." "Worth all the money in the world."

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- ☐ Better figure
- ☐ Round shoulders
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- ☐ Constipation
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- ☐ Enlarged abdomen
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- ☐ Stomach trouble
- ☐ Misplaced organs

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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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NUMBER 1



## Above Suspicion

By ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

### CHAPTER I.

WITH THE LIGHT OF MORNING,

THE great, inner square court of Mrs. Samuel Cayley's new country house at Sunny Beach was flooded with the dazzling bright light of early morning. It glinted not only down through the lofty, glass-domed roof, but in from the whole north side thrown open to the glistening, sandy shore with the dancing blue waters just beyond. In conformity with the Spanish style, the rooms were built in two stories, with a gallery running around the three inclosed sides, and as Carp, the butler, came down the staircase his faded eyes blinked in the glare and he shook his head disapprovingly.

These newfangled copies of foreign architecture were not to his liking. He was sure he should never get used to this huge, bare-sanded court with its fountain and the ugly stone seats scattered about instead of a spacious veranda outside where a body could serve tea and iced drinks after the old-established custom of his two generations with the best families.

Moreover, something was wrong. Carp paused at the foot of the staircase uncertain what it was which seemed out of place. Then as his eyes became accustomed to the light he saw that the great center double door of glass across the patio opening on the still unfinished concrete terrace stood widely ajar.

Directly facing it with its massive, carved

back to him was the stone bench upon which he had left Mr. Benkard seated on the previous evening when the latter announced that he himself would lock up. He had evidently forgotten to do so, but it would never do to have him come down and be reminded of it by finding now that the house had been left open on the shoreward side all night.

Carp hurried across the sanded stone floor skirting the fountain and the end of that wide-armed marble bench. Then he stopped all at once and a shrill, high-pitched scream tore its way from his throat.

"Henry Carp, have you gone crazy?" A sharp-featured housemaid of indeterminate age appeared hurriedly at the head of the stairs adjusting her apron as she came. "Do you want to wake up the house, yelling like that? What is it?"

But Carp could only wave to her inarticulately. He was grimacing in a horrible fashion and seemed to be staring down at something at his feet, something which was concealed from her by the high back of the seat. She hurried down and across to him, then stifled the cry which rose to her own lips. Lying face downward at their feet was the body of a man in dinner clothes with the whole back of his head a shapeless, spongy, congealed mass and the white sand all about it stained a hideous, reddish-brown.

"It isn't—it can't be Mr. Benkard." Her lips barely formed the superfluous question, but the old man nodded, gripping her wiry arm for support.

"Who else? He was the only gentleman in the house after Mr. Lane started back to the city and I left him here smoking when Mrs. Cayley and the young ladies had gone to bed. I left him here smoking on that very seat!"

Carp's voice had risen in a cracking falsetto.

"Letty, what could ha' happened?"

Letitia opened her lips to speak, but paused as though realizing the futility of the suggestion she was about to offer. At that moment a cheerful if somewhat monotonously whistled refrain sounded from outside and a tall, lanky workman in overalls crossed the terrace toward the pile of

concrete blocks just beyond the open glass doors.

"Leave go my arm!" Letitia exclaimed. "Geoff! Geoff, come here, will you?"

The workman turned, revealing a long, lantern-jawed face with mild, ruminative brown eyes and a shock of sandy hair beneath his cap.

"What's up?" he asked in a slow, nasal drawl as he pushed the doors open and entered. Then at sight of the body he halted. "Land o' Liberty!"

"It's Mrs. Cayley's brother, Mr. Joseph Benkard," replied Letitia. "You know him, don't you?"

"I know him, all right."

The man called "Geoff" was still staring down at the body.

"I wouldn't swear that was him, though, unless I seen his face."

"I left him here smoking last night, and he said he'd finish locking up!" Carp repeated the only fact which his stunned mind seemed still able to grasp. "I'd already tended to the ground floor windows and big front entrance door over there on the other side of the house."

"The ladies had all gone to their rooms and there wasn't anybody else on the place but Letty and the cook and me! He was right there on that bench lounging carelessly and the terrace doors were standing half open, just the way you found them when you came in a minute ago. He—he couldn't have fell over backward and hit his head on something and then fell forward again—"

"Henry Carp, stop talkin' like an old fool!" Letty seized his arm in her turn and gave it a little shake. "There's been a—an accident, or somethin'. What do you think, Geoff?"

"He's dead, anyways," the individual appealed to responded laconically. "Better let the folks know and mebbe Doc Hood. 'Tain't my business; got to get back to my work."

He turned as though to go out on the terrace once more, but at the word "dead" Carp had reeled and would have fallen if Letty had not caught him.

"Geoff Peters, I s'pose you'd be mixin' concrete if the skies fell!" she exclaimed

witheringly. "Help me to ease him down on the bench—"

"Seems to me I wouldn't do that if I was you."

Geoff's mild eyes glanced once more speculatively at the prostrate, motionless figure as he relieved her of the old butler's limp weight.

"Course 'tain't my business, but if you ask me seems to me I'd stay away from that bench and everything round it, and keep other folks away, too, till the doc gits here. Kinder think I'd put Henry on that stone seat over there instead."

"Why?" Letty's sharp tones were hushed as she helped to lead Carp's tottering steps in the direction indicated.

"Footprints." The workman spoke in as matter-of-fact a manner as though he were discussing a detail in masonry. "Doc Hood's med'cal examiner—used to be called 'coroner' when Sunny Beach was just Miller's Cove and outside the city limits—and he's mighty partic'lar about footprints in this kind of an accident."

"This kind '!" Letty repeated, horror-stricken, and for once in her capable existence she was at a loss. "How'll I keep Mrs. Cayley and the rest from crowdin' round soon's I wake 'em and tell 'em that—that somethin's happened to Mr. Benkard?"

"You go git me a piece o' rope," Geoff suggested. "There's some out by the concrete mixer."

When she had flown out to the terrace Geoff strolled at a discreet distance about the bench and the body lying before it, and then his glance roved around the patio, but every marble seat and flower urn was in its place, with no trace in the sand to indicate that any of them had been disturbed; the circular fountain bed still awaiting the statue which was to crown it was dry and empty, and through the center of the glass dome overhead the slender flagpole could be discerned, the gilded eagle at its top gleaming in the sun.

Geoff shook his head slowly and his gaze traveled up the marble staircase and around the stucco balcony, with its ornamental railing and posts here and there, each surmounted by a ball which he himself had helped to set, mushroomlike, in the mortar.

Behind the closed doors on that balcony lay the members of the household, as yet unaware of the tragedy which had overtaken them in the night, and the observer shrugged; he was glad it wasn't up to him to enlighten them, a passel of hysterical city women! He prided himself on minding his own affairs, did Geoffrey Peters. He was there to complete the concrete and stucco terrace and he didn't aim to get mixed up in any to-do about what had happened to Joseph Benkard!

"This is all I could find." Letty reappeared from the terrace. "We might take some of that riggin' that runs down from the dome and fastens under the balcony so's the flag can be h'isted and lowered from inside, but there isn't any ladder round long enough—"

"We can make out with this."

Geoff took from her the coil of plaster-smeared rope, and tying one end of it to a hinge of the glass door, he passed it around several of the urns and stone seats and back to the other side of the half-opened door once more so that it formed a rude semicircle several feet distant from about the bench. There he fastened it and then ducked beneath it and paused on the threshold.

"Better tell your folks to keep outside o' that till the doc comes. I'm goin' to work. Mis' Cayley can find me on the job if she needs me."

He slouched out on the terrace and disappeared, and Letty, after one hopeless glance at Carp's limp figure, turned and flew up the stairs.

"Mrs. Cayley!" She knocked with a sharp insistence at one of the doors leading on to the gallery. Again she knocked. "Oh, Mrs. Cayley, ma'am!"

There was a sound of movement within, and a portly figure in negligée, with graying hair in a disheveled but permanently waved coiffure, opened the door.

"Why have you disturbed me, Letty?" she demanded in cold displeasure. "Haven't I told you—"

"Oh, ma'am!" Letty wrung her angular hands. "Something terr'ble has happened! It must have been some time durin' the night, for Henry Carp only found him

just now, and when he called out I ran down, and then Geoff Peters came—"

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Cayley's contralto tones had lowered tensely and she gripped the housemaid's wrist as in a vise while another door farther along the gallery opened slightly. "What has happened and who have you found?"

"Mr. Benkard, ma'am! He's lyin' down there dead in the court with the back of his head all crushed in—"

"Dead! Joseph—dead!" Mrs. Cayley started back, repeating the hoarse whisper over and over while both hands flew to her carefully massaged throat, and she stared straight before her as though unconscious of the presence of her informant. "Joseph!"

"Yes, ma'am. He—he looks as though he'd been layin' there all night, and Geoff Peters says nobody must go near—"

Her words were choked back, for Mrs. Cayley had suddenly thrust her aside with an imperious sweep of her arm and started for the stairs. A tall young woman in a loose robe with great ropes of red-brown hair hanging over each shoulder intercepted her.

"Mrs. Cayley, I could not avoid hearing that something was wrong. If I can help you, if I can be of any assistance—"

"Vera, my dear!" The stern lines of repression softened for a moment in the older woman's face and she steadied herself with a hand on the railing. "It is my brother! I do not understand, but I fear that some accident or illness has come to him, and I am going down to find out for myself. Stay with Mildred and don't let her see or know anything if you can help it; above all, do not allow her to come downstairs."

"You don't mean—" The girl's rich voice faltered. "Has—has something terrible happened? Oh, don't you want me to go down with you? Mr. Benkard isn't—"

"The servants have just found him. Letty exaggerates, of course, but I gather that he is lying unconscious out on the terrace somewhere; he may have been there for hours! Mildred is so excitable that I want the child kept out of the way until her uncle has been cared for."

"It is—as bad as that!" The young woman's soft brown eyes closed for a mo-

ment and her face whitened, while a pulse beat suddenly in the slim, ivory column of her throat. Then her eyes opened full upon her hostess and she replied in low, steady tones: "I will take care of Mildred, of course, Mrs. Cayley, but if there is anything further that I can do—if you need me in any way—please send for me."

"I will, my dear."

The gaze of both women turned downward into the patio, but from where they stood they could see only the figure of the old butler huddled in his seat and the roped-off semicircle about the terrace doors.

Then Mrs. Cayley moved forward to the staircase while the girl stood quite still for a moment where she had left her. The folds of the loose robe which she wore revealed rather than concealed the splendid sweeping lines of her form. She would have appeared like a statue had it not been for the rapid rise and fall of her breast.

All at once a girlish voice made shrill by apprehension sounded down the gallery.

"Letty, what is it? Why do you look so strange, and why has mother gone downstairs like that?"

"Please, Miss Sherwood, will you tell Miss Mildred?" the housemaid paused to whisper hurriedly. "Henry Carp isn't goin' to be a mite of use and Mrs. Cayley 'll need me. Will you tell Miss Mildred that—that her uncle died sudden in the night?"

"Her uncle—died!" Vera Sherwood repeated almost mechanically. "This is horrible, Letty! Are you sure? He was perfectly well last evening! How—how could he have died?"

"I'm sure enough, miss; I saw him!" Letty responded with grim emphasis. "I'm sorry to have to break it so quick to Mrs. Cayley and—to you, miss, but Mr. Benkard's been dead for hours from a—an accident, it looks like, to the back of his head. I—I'd better go to Mrs. Cayley."

She followed her mistress down the stairs, and Vera Sherwood turned slowly back along the gallery to the open door, on the threshold of which stood a younger girl, a dainty fairylike little creature, whose bobbed, ash-blond hair curled in soft ringlets like a baby's about her head and whose deep, violet eyes were wide with alarm.

"Oh, Vera, what is the matter?" she cried. "Letty looks as though she had seen a ghost, and mother never in the world would appear like that before any one in the morning unless there was some frightfully important reason for her to leave her room! Why didn't she call me, and what was Letty saying to you just now?"

"We didn't think you were awake." Vera sought to draw the younger girl back. "Come into your room, dear—"

"I won't be treated like a child!" Mildred wrenched herself free. "I don't mean to be rude, but there is something you are keeping from me, and I must know! If you won't tell me, I am going straight downstairs!"

"Then you will displease your mother and—" Vera paused, biting her lips, then went on determinedly: "and your uncle very much. Come, and I will tell you the little I know myself of what has happened. We cannot talk out here."

"Your hands are like ice, and your voice—your voice doesn't seem like you at all, somehow!"

The other girl began to sob hysterically, but she retreated into her room, permitting her companion to follow and close the door. "Tell me!"

"My dear, you must try to control yourself. It is about your uncle; he has been taken suddenly ill. Carp is with him, and he sent Letty upstairs for your mother, who asked me to wait here and keep you with me." Vera looked away, but she gave the explanation in a steady, quiet tone. "Perhaps we had better dress, though, for your uncle may grow worse, and we will have to receive people; the doctor, or possibly some of your uncle's business associates from town."

She moved to the dressing table and commenced to unbraid her heavy, shining hair with fingers that shook suddenly.

"Uncle Joe ill!" Mildred's sobs had ceased, and she stared in amazement, but there was a singular absence of solicitude in her voice. "Why, he can't be, Vera! He's never known a day's illness in his life!"

"It is a touch of the sun from yesterday, probably, for Letty said something

about your uncle's head," Vera replied without turning. "Come and dress, Millie."

Meanwhile Mrs. Cayley had crossed the patio to the dividing rope and stood for a moment motionless, looking beyond it to that which lay in front of the bench. An odd, choking sound came from her throat, and she made a gesture as though to start forward, but restrained herself and remained there tense and quivering in every nerve until Letty came up to her and all but cried out at sight of her face.

"Oh, ma'am, don't look like that! I told you—I told you what had happened! Just you let me know what you want done and I'll do it! Henry Carp's gone all to pieces, but you know I—I can keep my head, and Geoff Peters is right outside on the terrace."

Was there a covert warning as well as personal assurance in the housemaid's speech? Mrs. Cayley gave no visible sign of recognizing either, but she asked in a hushed though peremptory tone:

"What has been done?"

"Nothin' but to put this rope up here. Geoff did that: he said nobody ought to go anywhere's near and track up the sand on the floor until—until the doctor was got. He said that in—in trouble like this the doctor would take charge of things."

"Call the man in."

Mrs. Cayley gave one last, shuddering glance at her brother's body, and then, drawing her negligee more firmly about her throat, she turned to where the butler was striving feebly to gather himself together.

"Don't try to rise, Carp. You found Mr. Benkard, Letty tells me; was he like this? Are you quite sure that he had already passed away?"

Habit was strong in the old servant, and he made one more final effort to get upon his feet before sinking back inertly in the seat.

"I beg pardon, madam, but I—I've a gone feeling, somehow. It was me found Mr. Benkard, as Letty says, and that not half an hour ago. He was the way you see him now, and there wasn't any need to go near him!"

The quavering voice faltered and then

went on: "I can't think what could have happened, madam. I left him here alone, smoking and looking out through those open doors at the Sound, all shivery like in the moonlight. He said I was to go to bed, that he would lock up later."

For an instant the faded eyes met the dry, burning ones of his mistress furtively, and it was almost as though question and answer of another sort had passed mutely between them, for Carp's shrunken body seemed to sag still more, and Mrs. Cayley turned slightly from him. Then she remarked:

"I cannot think what is keeping Letty; I sent her for the mason, Geoffrey, and she said he was just outside on the terrace. Carp, are you quite sure that was all Mr. Benkard said to you?"

She added the last in a low, hurried tone, as if it were forced from her lips, and the butler's gaze met hers once more, this time in steady candor.

"That was all, madam, except that I was to be sure cook had breakfast for him on time this morning. He can have had no notion that he was going to—to be took ill so sudden."

There was time for no more, for Letty appeared at this moment with the taciturn Geoff in tow.

"He was 'way 'round in front plasterin' up a crack in one of the flower urns, ma'am," she explained. "He says if there's anythin' he can do—"

"It was very thoughtful of you to rope off this space, Geoffrey." Mrs. Cayley spoke with a forced composure which left her lips stiffened and white. "I appreciate your taking the initiative at this sad and terrible time."

"Well, ma'am"—Geoff turned his cap about between his plaster-smeared fingers—"I aim to mind my own business, but I kinder thought you'd want it done, bein's you're city folks and strange to the ways out here when a accident like this happens."

"That is why I sent for you just now." Mrs. Cayley nodded. "I suppose there are local authorities to be telephoned for in the case of—sudden death."

If the workman noted her slight hesitation he appeared to attach no significance

to it. His stolid, mildly ruminative countenance did not change an iota in expression as he nodded in his turn and drawied:

"Only Doc Hood, ma'am. You git him on the wire—Main 38—and tell him how Henry found things when he come down this mornin', and he'll be here in a jiffy to take charge. He'll do whatever there is to be done. Is there any ways I can help you now, Mis' Cayley, before I git back to my cement work?"

"You might assist Henry upstairs to his room, if you will. He is quite unfit for anything, and must rest. This Dr. Hood—I have heard of him, although we have had no need of a physician's service since we came. He is an official as well, is he not?"

"Yes, ma'am; med'cal examiner." Geoff folded his cap and stuffed it into the pocket of his overalls. "If you'll tell me which is Henry's room—"

"Letty will go with you and show you where it is situated."

Mrs. Cayley glanced once more with a shudder at the roped-in semicircle, and then turned toward one of the doors under the gallery, but paused. "The work on the terrace must be discontinued now, of course, but I wish you would stay here, Geoffrey, at least until I can summon my brother's secretary from town. I may need you."

Geoff glanced down and shuffled one foot awkwardly in the sand.

"'Course 'tain't my business, but seein's you ask me, ma'am, I can stick around," he responded at length, not unwillingly, adding: "I got a plenty jobs to do that 'll keep me within call."

"I shall appreciate it." Mrs. Cayley turned away once more as Letty approached the butler's huddled figure and remarked:

"We're goin' to get you upstairs now, Henry. Come on, Geoff, he can walk up between us all right, I guess."

But that individual did not immediately respond. Instead, he scraped the sand aside with a quick dig of his square-toed boot, disclosing that which his shuffling motion of a moment before had covered, and picking it up, thrust it hastily into the pocket with his cap.

It was just a scrap of some soft, black, glossy fabric which had lain unnoticed near

one of the urns back of the bench, yet it possessed an interest, indeed, for Geoffrey Peters, the stonemason.

## CHAPTER II.

### "HOW DID HE DIE?"

THE bluff, hearty voice which replied to Mrs. Cayley over the wire was unlike the suave, professionally sympathetic ones of the fashionable city physicians to whom she had been accustomed; but when she announced her identity and the purport of her call it rang with a note of unstudied human feeling.

"Your brother, you say, Mrs. Cayley? Died suddenly? I know Mr. Benkard by sight, of course. Shocked to hear it! I'll be over right after—"

"You don't understand, doctor," Mrs. Cayley interrupted in her tensely repressed tones. "Mr. Benkard was injured in some manner during the night, no one seems to know how. It is in your official capacity that I have called you at the suggestion of the local carpenter and mason who happens to be working here for me. My brother—his death was not a natural one."

"Ah, I see! In that case I will come at once. Please make sure that nothing is disturbed until I get there, and tell Geoff Peters to wait. That's the man you mean, isn't it?"

The kindly voice had crisped with peremptory authority, and Mrs. Cayley replied swiftly:

"Yes."

"Tell him to give you any assistance you may need in keeping every one away from the body till I reach you, which will be in less than twenty minutes. Good-by."

The instrument clicked abruptly, and after hanging up the receiver Mrs. Cayley stood for a moment lost in thought. Great tremors were shaking her whole body, but into her dry eyes a feverish glitter had come, and a furrow of indecision grew and deepened between her brows. At last she took the receiver down again and called a number in New York City.

While she waited her gaze wandered about the austere yet subtly luxurious li-

brary, where she had seated herself before the ancient Mission table upon which the telephone stood. The impersonal exactitude of the professional interior decorator was everywhere in evidence; but the humid, carelessly left open before her, displaying a certain brand of cigar with a familiarly flamboyant label, the newspapers of the previous evening crumpled and cast aside, the cunningly concealed cellarette with its doors now swinging idly ajar, the goggles and motor gloves forgotten upon the top of the tall bookcase where their owner had placed them on entering only a short twelve hours earlier—all these trifling, silent witnesses to a living human presence made the ghastly tableau in the patio seem like the figment of a disordered dream. Mrs. Cayley set her lips more firmly, and when a sleepy masculine voice came at last to her ears in reply to her call, her own tones were under the same iron control as before.

"Mr. Lane? This is Mrs. Cayley speaking. I have frightful news for you, and I must tell you quickly. Joe is dead!"

A sharp, inarticulate cry answered her as though she had struck the man an unexpected physical blow, and she went on rapidly:

"Carp found him this morning in the patio. It must have happened soon after you started back to town last night. The authorities are on their way here now, and I thought, as the most intimate friend of the family, you should be notified."

"But good God! You don't mean—" All traces of sleep had vanished from the voice now, and it was strident with horror. "He wasn't—murdered?"

Mrs. Cayley flinched at the word.

"It may have been an accident of some kind, but his head has been terribly crushed—I can't say any more! No one knows—no one heard anything—"

"I understand, I—God! I've never had such a shock!" There was a pause, and then the voice went on: "I'll be out, of course, just as quick as the car can make it; but in the meantime, isn't there something I can do for you here in town? Joe's attorneys ought to be notified immediately."

"Yes, will you do that please, Mr. Lane? Tell Mr. Newbury that I am naturally

prostrated, and you are acting for me. It is of vital importance to get in touch with Joe's office, too, as soon as it opens, and have William Dunn come down here by the first train."

"I'll leave word with my own secretary to have that attended to, and I'll get Newbury. There isn't anything I can say to you now, Mrs. Cayley, but you know how this has hit me! Joe—I can't realize it! My God, it's like a nightmare!"

Lane paused again as though in an effort to pull himself together, and then added: "Just you try to keep your nerve and carry on until I get there, and don't do any more talking than you have to. We don't know what this may mean for all of us."

"I quite understand." Mrs. Cayley's tone had hardened perceptibly. "I think that I shall be able to bear up, at least until you come. I was sure that I could count on you."

"To the end, Mrs. Cayley! I'm going to burn up the roads getting there, and every minute is of value now, so unless there is anything else you can suggest for me to attend to from town here—"

"Nothing. I shall wait anxiously for your coming. Good-by."

Mrs. Cayley replaced the receiver, and rising, turned to find Letty standing in the doorway.

"Did you call me, ma'am? Geoff said he thought he heard you, and I was afraid maybe you were faint or something."

The woman's sharp features were drawn, but a bright spot of color glowed in each cheek and her eyes were alight with suppressed excitement.

"I didn't call, but I shall want you to come and help me dress immediately," Mrs. Cayley responded. "Where is Geoffrey? Dr. Hood wishes him to wait here without fail."

"I left him gettin' Henry to lie down, because I heard 'Zeppa stirrin' around, and I had to tell her what—what had happened. She's havin' regular hysterics, and won't be any use in the kitchen, but I've put some coffee on, ma'am, for you've got to keep up your strength."

Mrs. Cayley dismissed the suggestion with a gesture of repugnance, but a second

thought made her realize its wisdom, and telling Letty to bring a cup to her room, she started up the staircase. On the gallery she encountered the mason sauntering from the direction of Henry Carp's room.

"Dr. Hood will be here at any moment now," she informed him. "He wants you to wait here to see him."

Geoff nodded.

"I'll be right outside, Mis' Cayley, and likely see him comin'," he replied.

Passing on to her own room Mrs. Cayley was on the point of entering when her daughter's door further down the gallery flew open and Mildred appeared upon the threshold. She had dressed in evident haste, and her small white face quivered with fear.

"Mother, what is it? I will know the truth! Vera has gone back to her own room to dress, but she told me Uncle Joe was ill, and neither you nor he wanted me to go downstairs. What does it mean?"

Mrs. Cayley slowly approached her daughter, but did not touch her. Instead, she looked steadily down into the violet-blue eyes raised to her own, and spoke in a low, clear tone, strangely devoid of any natural tenderness.

"I have tried all your life to teach you self-control, Mildred, and the time has come for you to exert it. Your uncle is dead."

The girl's whole slender body quivered as though under the stroke of a lash, and she caught her breath in a little gasp.

"I felt it!" she whispered. "I knew that something dreadful had come! Mother, how did he die?"

"Look over the railing down into the patio and you will see."

There seemed to be calculated cruelty in the coldness of the older woman's tone.

"Remember, no scenes! We do not know who is responsible for your uncle's death, but in any event there will be endless questioning, hideous notoriety. The medical examiner—a representative of the police—is coming, and so is Stoneham Lane—I have sent for him."

"Why?" Mildred stiffened and seemed to grow inches taller as she drew herself up under the stern, commanding gaze bent upon her. "What is he to us?"

Low as it was, her voice rang with an open defiance that was like a declaration of warfare, and for a moment the two strange antagonists, mother and daughter, faced each other in silence. Then Mrs. Cayley replied with sudden suavity.

"Our oldest and closest family friend. He will take charge of everything for us. Bear that in mind, my child, when he arrives. I will not reproach you now for your past attitude; you know, of course, what your future one must be. Your uncle's death has rendered it inevitable that his last wishes shall be obeyed."

The girl's rosebud lips curled over so slightly.

"We are not living in the Middle Ages now, mother. I'm not going to pretend any grief that I don't feel, nor acknowledge any absurd obligation for the future. Whatever else Uncle Joe may have been, he was no hypocrite, nor will I be. If Mr. Lane is coming to act for you as a family friend, my attitude toward him will be becomingly grateful, I can promise you. I wonder—I wonder who—"

"Here's your coffee, ma'am." Letty appeared at Mrs. Cayley's elbow with a tray, and the latter directed:

"Take it into my room, please." Then to her daughter she added: "We will have a little talk later, Mildred. Meanwhile, if you cannot feel any natural grief over the tragedy which has come upon us I must at least insist that you show to every one a decent respect for your uncle's memory."

She glanced meaningly toward the room occupied by their guest, Vera Sherwood, and turning, vanished within her own door. Left alone, the young girl took one tentative step toward the railing of the gallery as though to follow her mother's callously given advice and look down for herself at the scene.

The next moment, with a little shiver, she covered her face with her hands and fled back into her own room.

Meanwhile Geoff Peters had lingered at the stairs' head until he saw Letty emerge from below when he had hurried down and out to the terrace where he busied himself gathering up the loose sections of board and scattered implements left from his work

of the previous day. Soon the rattle of an ancient car approaching at breakneck speed over the new-cut private road made him hasten to the driveway.

A stout man of perhaps fifty sat behind the wheel, and beside him was a younger man as lean and lanky as the mason himself, but clad in the blue and brass of a metropolitan police lieutenant, a uniform which seemed as he clambered down to clothe his awkward frame with almost ludicrous incongruity.

"Hey, Geoff Peters!" He bustled forward officiously. "What's been goin' on here? Murder?"

"Stopped by at the station house for Zeke Foster," explained the stout man as he shut off the engine. "Thought from what Mrs. Cayley said that he'd be needed. You got my message, Geoff? Been keeping every one away from the body?"

Geoff nodded.

"Got the place all round where it was found roped off, doc," he drawled. "Reckon I was the first to see it after the old butler and the hired girl, and neither of them would have gone a nigh it for their lives. It's right inside the terrace doors."

He turned to lead the way around the house, but Zeke Foster hurried ahead, and Dr. Hood laid a detaining hand on the mason's arm.

"Geoff, you've been working here pretty regular since before the family moved down from the city, and you see a lot more than most folks give you credit for. I'll want to talk to you about them later, but what's this look like to you?"

"I aim to 'tend to my own affairs, doc." Geoff shook his head. "You better make up your mind when you see what's happened to Mr. Benkard. If a man could smash the back of his own head in and go off and hide the weapon somewheres, and then come back and lay down and die right in front of where he'd been settin', I'd say it might be suicide, but otherwise I ain't offerin' no opinion."

"Humph!" the doctor ejaculated. "So that was the way of it! It's a good thing you thought to rope off the space all around it, in case of footprints."

Something like the hint of a grin ap-

peared for a moment at the corners of the mason's wide mouth, but he made no rejoinder. As they reached the terrace doors he silently pointed within.

Zeke Foster was staring open-mouthed at the body, but the doctor, after one swift glance at it, turned to Geoff.

"Give me a couple of those boards there from that pile you've been using for your concrete work," he directed. "I'm going to protect the loose sand on the floor from the mark of another footstep. Stand aside, Zeke!"

The lately appointed police lieutenant obeyed with a surly air. Placing the boards carefully in a line from the threshold to directly beside the dead man, Dr. Hood walked gingerly along them and then knelt to examine the ghastly wound. When he rose and turned, his fat face was very grave, but his eyes snapped with excitement.

"More boards, Geoff—short lengths, so I can make sharp turns with them."

"But, what is it, doc? Murder, sure enough?" Zeke Foster demanded. "I'm constable—I mean, lieutenant—and I got a right to investigate—"

"So has police headquarters, now that we're part of the city," the doctor interrupted. "It's murder, all right, for there's nothing lying around loose that could have fallen on him, and if it had it would have struck the top of his head and not the base of the brain like that, unless he was already lying flat on his face."

"Better call up the homicide bureau of the district attorney's office at the county seat, and notify them to send a detective down here to work with you, Zeke. That'll save your face, for otherwise they'll have a bunch of their own men down here to take the case right out of your hands. This family is too rich and prominent, and especially Mr. Benkard himself, for the big fellows to leave the investigation in our hands. Know where the phone is, Geoff?"

"In the library there, where the door opens under the gallery." The mason pointed. "That's where Mis' Cayley went to call you while I was gettin' Henry upstairs. He's the butler, and he was struck all of a heap by findin' the body."

Zeke Foster departed upon his errand, and the medical examiner proceeded to make a path about the bench with the pieces of board which Geoff handed him, laying each one painstakingly on a smooth space of sand unmarred by the slightest touch.

When he had completed the semicircle to the other side of the terrace doors he worked his way back slowly upon his hands and knees, scrutinizing the space on either side of his improvised path. Then he rose and stood staring about the patio, while his companion watched him with a twinkle of somewhat grim amusement in his mild brown eyes.

"Geoff, come here a minute." Dr. Hood led him abruptly out on the terrace. "Who have you seen around here besides Mrs. Cayley and her daughter and the hired help?"

"Only the young lady that's visitin' them, a friend o' Mr. Benkard's who runs out now and again from the city—Lane, his name is—and that young feller from Ashcroft, who comes to see little Miss Cayley." He indicated a neighboring estate, the tall, ornate chimneys of which showed above the trees to the west. "There is Mr. Benkard's sec'tary, too, but I ain't seen him lately."

"And the only servants are the cook and the housemaid and that doddering old butler?" the doctor persisted.

"That's all. The garage ain't finished yet, and Mr. Benkard drove his own car and kept it at Jake's service station down to the Cove. Mr. Benkard used to telephone when he got here, and Jake would send one o' his helpers up for it. There ain't even been anybody else workin' round the place but me since the city contractor's men quit their job last week."

"I heard something about that. They walked out because of a row with Mr. Benkard, didn't they?"

Geoff rubbed his chin reflectively.

"'Twasn't none o' my business," he affirmed at last. "I'd been doin' odd jobs round—concrete and stucco and a special mixture o' my own that Mr. Benkard liked the looks of—and he asked me if I could finish their work on the garage and the ter-

race here. I said I could, and that was the end o' it."

"You didn't hear the men make any threats before they left?" Dr. Hood asked.

"I wasn't payin' 'tention," responded Geoff. "I work independent, and I had no truck with them."

"You found the housemaid and the butler here with the body this morning?" The doctor pursued a new line of questioning.

"Considerable ways back o' where I've stretched the rope they was, round at that end o' the bench." Geoff gestured toward the spot.

"And you put up that rope, Geoff Peters, so that nobody could track up any footprints the murderer might have left coming up behind Mr. Benkard where he sat on this end of the bench?" There was an odd note in Dr. Hood's voice. "There's blood spattered on the back of it from the blow that killed him before the body toppled forward, but did you look at the sanded floor yourself?"

"Reckon I did, doc," Geoff chuckled dryly. "Seen one set o' footprints goin' across the court and round the bench to that end where he was settin'."

"But you didn't see a second set pointed in any other direction, did you?" The doctor spoke in impatience mixed with an almost awed bewilderment. "They were his own tracks, of course, made when he went there to sit and smoke, and two of his cigar butts are lying close to the body, but that is all! There isn't a sign of a footprint anywhere around that bench near enough for any one to have approached and struck him down!"

"That's why I roped it off so partic'lar, doc," Geoff remarked, chuckling again.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A BROKEN FRIENDSHIP.

"I'VE taken Mr. Benkard's body down to my own office, ma'am, for of course you know there'll have to be an autopsy." Dr. Hood's voice was filled with respectful sympathy. "It's only a matter of form, though, for there isn't any doubt of the direct cause of death."

Mrs. Cayley, in a straight black gown which accentuated the portly lines of her figure, leaned across the library table and spoke in a choking whisper.

"You mean that wound on his head, doctor?"

"It was a crushing blow which fractured the skull at the base of the brain like an eggshell. Death must have been instantaneous." The doctor took off his spectacles and wiped them carefully. "I should judge from my first examination that it took place eight or nine hours ago, at midnight or a little after."

"There is no possibility of an accident?" Her hands clasped and unclasped nervously.

"None, Mrs. Cayley. There was nothing anywhere about the court which could have caused such a blow, and even if the stone seats and flower urns had not all been in their exact positions, they are too heavy for a single person to have lifted any one of them. You had no intimation of this until your maid knocked at your door and told you an hour ago?"

"Naturally not!" She touched her eyes with her handkerchief. "I left my poor brother in the best of health and spirits when I retired, and I heard nothing during the night."

"What time did you retire, Mrs. Cayley? I am sorry to trouble you with all these questions now, but a representative of the city authorities is on his way out here, and if I can give him as full an account as possible of what has occurred, and the events of last night as far as you know them, it may save you much annoyance." There was a significant hint in the doctor's voice that was not on his *vis-à-vis*, and she shuddered.

"I am more than anxious to give the authorities any help in my power if my brother was—was done to death—but I can scarcely realize it," she murmured. "He was a man of dominant personality and quick temper, and as such many people found him naturally antagonistic, but I never heard of any personal enemy of his—certainly none who would have taken his life!"

"I went to my room at a few minutes

just eleven last night—my daughter had already retired—and I was almost immediately followed by Miss Vera Sherwood, our guest, who had paused for a moment to say good night to my brother in the library. She chatted with me for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes before she left me, and then I went at once to bed. I cannot believe that so soon after—”

She paused, as though overcome by her emotions, and Dr. Hood waited for a brief space before he asked: “Mr. Benkard went to the city yesterday, did he not? Will you please tell me, Mrs. Cayley, everything that happened, no matter how trivial, from the moment of his return? Did he come by train or in his car, and was he alone?”

“He motored out by himself, reaching here about half past five, and said that Mr. Lane, who was to have accompanied him, had been detained, but would follow later in his own car for dinner. I refer to Mr. J. Stoneham Lane, my brother’s closest friend and his associate, I believe, in several financial deals, although they had formed no actual business partnership. Mr. Lane did not arrive until nearly seven, and we dined almost immediately.”

“There were no other guests except the lady you have already mentioned?”

“Yes—a young man with whom my daughter had been golfing at the country club in the afternoon, a neighbor of ours, Mr. Rupert Ashe; you probably know the family, doctor.”

Mrs. Cayley’s lips had unconsciously tightened, and her interrogator nodded.

“That made yourself, this Miss Sherwood, your daughter, Mr. Benkard, Mr. Lane and young Mr. Ashe—just six in all at dinner?”

“That was all. We dined most informally, for my house is scarcely finished and my full staff of servants not yet engaged. Carp and Letitia have been with me for years, but Mazeppa, the cook, only entered my service a few weeks ago, when we moved down here to Sunny Beach.”

“About last night, Mrs. Cayley,” the doctor prompted her gently. “Did everything seem quite as usual during dinner?”

“Oh, quite!” Mrs. Cayley’s eyes opened

wide. “We sat in the patio later, but at this end, not—not near the terrace doors. We could not make use of the terrace itself, for the special concrete, or whatever it is that the stonemason Geoffrey had just paved it with, had not yet dried and hardened, but after young Mr. Ashe left—which was early, about nine o’clock—my daughter and Mr. Lane strolled out into the garden while Miss Sherwood, my brother and I went to the drawing-room. There Miss Sherwood played for us. Are all these details necessary, doctor? They seem so inconsequential, in view of the terrible thing that happened later, and I can scarcely collect my thoughts.”

“It is because of what did occur later that no incident of last night is inconsequential, Mrs. Cayley,” he reminded her. “What happened after that?”

“My daughter went to bed, and Mr. Lane and Mr. Benkard talked together for a while in the dining room, which is just across the patio from the library. Then Mr. Lane returned to the city, and I retired, followed by Miss Sherwood, as I told you.

“Really, doctor, I can say nothing more. My brother usually sat up late, smoking and reading, or going over his accounts, and last night seemed no exception to the rule!”

Her tones had grown more and more unfeignedly agitated, and the doctor took up a fresh topic.

“Mr. Benkard seemed in the best of health and spirits. Has he told you of any difficulty or antagonism he may have encountered in his business lately?”

“He has never discussed his proposed financial deals with me; only my own affairs, of which he has assumed complete charge for several years. I am quite sure that he has experienced no business difficulties, but Mr. Lane will be better able to tell you about that.”

She paused and then went on:

“I called him up at his rooms in town immediately after telephoning to you, and although he was inexpressibly shocked, of course, he promised to come out as quickly as his car could bring him. He is going to leave word for Mr. Benkard’s secretary,

Mr. Dunn, to follow at once, and also notify our family lawyer, Mr. Newbury. I—I felt that my daughter and I, alone out here with our guest, would need the support and assistance of my brother's friends and associates in this terrible hour."

"You acted wisely, Mrs. Cayley."

Dr. Hood readjusted his spectacles, with which he had been meditatively tapping the table, and rose.

"I need not caution you," he continued, "that the news of this affair will travel wide and fast, and you will have a crowd of city reporters out here in no time. It would be better not to have any of your household make a statement, at least until the detective from the county seat comes to take charge of the case. My own investigation as medical examiner will be separate, of course, but I'll try to keep you from being bothered any more than I can help."

"I am sure you will, doctor." Mrs. Cayley rose also, and once more her handkerchief went to her eyes. "The loss of my brother would have been grief enough to endure, but to have the end come in such a sudden, hideous fashion—to know that the one who is responsible for it is at large, and that we must all be subjected to this horrible notoriety and disgrace, is almost more than I can face! I must try to be brave, though, for my little daughter's sake."

"That is right," the doctor agreed soothingly. "By the way, I should like to see your daughter now for a minute, if I may?"

"But she can tell you nothing!" Mrs. Cayley's hands tightened suddenly until the wisp of lace and linen between her fingers was ripped asunder. "Mildred is just a child, and she is hysterical over this tragedy which has come upon us. It would be a waste of valuable time, I assure you, doctor, and needless torture for her at present in her unnerved condition."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but you'll have to realize that every one in this house—every one who was here last night or in any way connected with Mr. Benkard—will have to be questioned."

The note of authority sounded once more in Dr. Hood's tones, but before Mrs. Cayley

could expostulate further the hum of a swift-driven car sounded from the driveway, and she hurried out into the patio and to the great front entrance doors, which she flung wide.

"Oh, it is Mr. Lane! I hardly dared hope for your coming so soon, but I cannot tell you what it means to me to have you here—and to Mildred, too."

Stoneham Lane leaped from his car, and tearing off his goggled cap he flung it aside, and held out both hands to her. He was a man in the early forties, undeniably good-looking and faultlessly groomed, although his face was pallid now and his eyes haggard.

"Dear lady, I found it hard to believe—indeed, I can scarcely realize yet that your terrible message is true!" he exclaimed. "I have a summons for speeding in my pocket, and I very nearly ditched the car besides, but I came as quickly as I could! Tell me, in Heaven's name, that there has been some frightful mistake—that Joe has merely been injured in some way—"

"He has been dead since—since almost midnight!" Mrs. Cayley gave him her hands and then added quickly: "This is Dr. Hood, the medical examiner. He will tell you what details we know, and he wants to talk to you, I believe. I will see you later, but now I—I am too much overcome—"

The doctor gravely acknowledged the introduction. Neither of the trio observed the man in overalls who had followed from the patio, where he had been unobtrusively hanging about the library door, and who now disappeared around the corner of the house in the direction of the terrace shaking his head perplexedly.

He had just seated himself on the heap of plaster-stained boards when a youthful figure in a pedestrian suit, with his dark, curly head bare and his boyish face pale beneath its healthy coat of tan, bounded up the stone steps from the beach.

"Hello, Geoff! It isn't true, what they're saying around the Cove, that Mr. Benkard is dead! That he was murdered in the night!"

"Reckon that's about the size o' it, Mr. Ashe," Geoff responded, producing his pipe.

"Doc Hood's here now, and the constable, and that city friend o' Mr. Benkard's just come tearin' out in his car—that sporty-lookin' fellow, Lane."

"Good Lord!" The young man seated himself heavily beside the mason and pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his brow, which had suddenly grown damp. "Where was he found? Who did it, Geoff? Are you sure there's no mistake about it—that it was actually murder?"

"He was lyin' right in front o' that bench you see just inside them doors, and I was the first to see him this mornin' after Henry Carp and Letty. Dunno who done it, but unless he could bash the back o' his own head in like a ton o' brick had fell on him, it was murder, all right."

"But, who—"

"That's what Doc Hood and Zeke Foster are here to find out, and they've sent for some smart Aleck district attorney's feller to help 'em." Geoff filled and lighted his pipe placidly. "Seems to me I heard the doc say they was goin' to question everybody that had anythin' to do with the family and especially all the folks that was here 'ast night."

The young man set his teeth hard, and his face flushed.

"I was here myself, to dinner," he remarked half-defiantly. "I left pretty early, though; I can't stand that chap Lane. Say, Geoff, where's Miss Cayley? Have you seen her this morning at all? I am anxious to see her."

"Seems to me I did see her a little while ago up on the gallery when I come back from takin' Henry to his room." Geoff took the pipe from his lips and gazed at it reflectively. "'Tain't my business, but you cured that pup o' mine o' distemper last summer, Mr. Ashe, and little Miss Cayley, she—she don't let any dumb beasts git hurt when she's round. Seems to me when I seen her on the gallery she was havin' a high old fuss with her ma, and I kinder think I heard the name 'Lane' spoke of, now I come to think o' it."

"Damn him!" The young man's hands clenched. "You're a good scout, Geoff! Do you think she's in her room now? Can you get word to her somehow that I'm

down here and I simply must see her? It's underhanded, I know, but her mother would make all kinds of excuses if I announced myself in the regular way—especially just after—after this has happened; though I'll wager she'll make her receive Lane, fast enough! If I go out out the lawn under her window like some confounded *Romeo*, her mother might spot me and tell me in short order that my presence wasn't welcome now; and I've just got to see Miss Cayley! Isn't there some way that you can let her know?"

"Well," Geoff knocked the coals from his pipe and carefully stamped out the live embers. "I ain't amin' to take nothin' on myself, but I reckon everybody's kinder forgot old Henry, and seems to me I heard Letty sayin' somethin' about there bein' coffee on the stove. Mebbe if I was to take a cup up to him there wouldn't be no objections, and if it happened that I dropped a piece o' paper passin' down the gallery and my foot should shove it accidental like under a door—"

"You're a trump!" Young Mr. Ashe pulled a letter from his pocket and, tearing off the back of the envelope, he scribbled a few words upon it with the blunt stub of a pencil which his companion offered. "The next time you want any of the stray animals cured that you pick up, and I can't do it myself, I'll send for the best vet from town for you. Tell her if I'm not here I'll be on the lowest step of the terrace facing the beach, where they can't see me from the house."

The note and pencil changed hands, and Geoff sauntered indoors and to the kitchen, where he helped himself to a cup of coffee and started upstairs. A low murmur of voices came from the library, but he encountered no one on the gallery above. He accomplished his main mission with clumsy haste, and was rewarded by a startled exclamation in a girlish tone as his foot thumped against her door before he hurried along to Henry's room.

Every one had indeed forgotten the old butler, who had somewhat recovered his nerve and was almost pathetically grateful for the coffee. To his host of eager questions Geoff replied with his habitual taci-

turnity and then returned to the kitchen with the empty cup.

There he found a massive, dusky female clad in a purple silk dress and feathered hat, with a bulging grip on the floor beside her. She was rummaging among the cupboard shelves and turned with a smothered cry at his entrance.

"Lawsy, man, you done mek mah heart jump right up in mah mouf! Don't you tell nobuddy you seen me gwine till I'm on mah way! I'm jest lookin' fo' mah dream-book—"

"Ain't fixin' to go away, are you, 'Zepa?" he asked mildly.

"Ain't I?" She rolled her eyes meaningly at him. "Jest let me get shet o' dese here grounds, an' dere won't nobuddy see me fo' dust! Dese ain't mah folks; I only been wukkin' fo' 'em a month, an' I ain't lookin' to stay where dey's quar'ls an' murders an' dat kind o' ructions—not me! I ain't cravin' no 'quaintance wid de perlice, neither!"

"I ain't heard nobody quarrelin'," Geoff observed.

"Dat's countin' you knocks off at dark an' goes home. Not dat dey was much quar'lin' till last night, only Mr. Joseph gettin' mad now an' agin, an' once in a dawg's age little Miss Millie spunkin' up to answer him back. Powerful fond he was o' tellin' her an' her ma how much dey owed him!"

"Cose dey wasn't none o' dat atter Miss Sherwood come las' week—den Mr. Joseph ack like butter wouldn't melt in his mouf—only last night him an' dat other gen'leman, Mr. Lane, had it hot an' heavy in de dinin' room."

Mazeppa spoke with her back to him, and Geoff spied the lurid cover of the dream-book peeping out from behind the clock. Quietly taking possession of that choice specimen of literature, he stuffed it into the pocket where so recently his cap and that scrap of soft, black, glossy fabric had reposed, and then remarked:

"Reckon you've heard folks havin' words before where you worked, and that didn't have nothin' to do with Mr. Benkard gittin' killed, because he was all right long

after Mr. Lane had gone back to the city in that there car o' his."

"Ain't sayin' it did!" Mazeppa retorted. "Where at is dat book o' mine, I wonder? I finished mah dinner dishes long 'bout nine, an' I was jest gwine up to mah room when Miss Sherwood begun playin' on de pianer, an' I waited in de pantry to lissen. Lawsy, but dat lady kin play! When she stopped Mr. Joseph an' Mr. Lane come into de dinin' room right next de pantry an' shet de do', an' straight off dey commenced argufyin', but low, like dey didn't want nobuddy should hear.

"Den dey got madder an' madder an' deir voices done riz, an' seems like dey was quar'lin' 'bout some lady an' business, all mixed up togeder. Mr. Lane say he been made a fool of, but he was through; dat 'she'—whosomever 'she' is—wouldn't mek ma'iage wid him nobow, an' so he was gwine queer Mr. Joseph's deal an' show him up, countin' he'd been played fo' a sucker.

"Mr. Joseph try like he'd pacify him, but when he see dat it wasn't no use he tell him he'd break him like he did the others, but Mr. Lane say he'd get him first! Dey bofe cussed fluent an' free, an' I thought dey was fixin' fo' a real scrap, but Mr. Lane tuk hisself off, an' you could hear his cyar jest roarin' down de drive. Whar in time is mah book at?"

"That's mighty curious," remarked Geoff as he scratched his head reflectively. "I dunno who the lady could be, but 'tain't any o' my business. Is this what you was lookin' for?"

He held out the dream-book, and Mazeppa pounced upon it with an exclamation of pleasure. Then, picking up her grip, she started for the door, but a bulky, thick-set stranger barred her progress. He was in civilian clothes of a light gray mixture, with a collar too small for his thick bull neck. The smile that spread upon his beefy countenance was significant as he stepped forward.

"Not so fast, aunty," he said. "Better make up your mind to stick around a while longer. Nobody leaves this house till I say the word!"



# Her Father's Consent

By **GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD**

*Author of "Sea Gold," "The Hidden Hate," etc.*

**A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE**

## CHAPTER I.

**NO MEN NEED APPLY.**

"LET me catch another one of them hanging around you, that's all," threatened Pierre Marshall.

"What will you do?" asked Corinne.

"I'll do him an injury, that's what I'll do," returned Pierre Marshall, her father, more threateningly than ever. "Now see here, my girl: I've let you go your own way long enough and it's been a damned bad way. I've seen you in company within a short six months with five of the most abominable rogues this city has to show; five I've had to warn off the premises—"

"Abominable rogues!" gasped Corinne.

"I like that—"

"Glad you do," retorted her father grimly. "I don't."

"Abominable rogues!" she sniffed. "Why, every one of them is in the Social Register, the Blue Book—"

"None of them in Dun's or Bradstreet's, I notice."

"My good Lord, father!" replied the exasperated girl. "How do you expect me to ever get anywhere if you continually act as though money were everything—"

"Ask them—your five friends—ask them what they think about it. You'd pretty soon find out that *they* thought money was pretty nearly everything. You'd darn well discover they weren't coming to see Corinne Marshall, but 'old man Marshall's heiress.' You'd—"

Tears started to her eyes. "You make me feel so cheap—"

"Glad of that. I meant to!"

"Oh!" she stormed. "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"How I hate you! What—what right have you to talk about my friends that way? What right, what right?"

The rough-hewn, elderly face was turned toward the pretty young one.

"What right?" he repeated wonderingly. "Why, *every* right! To begin with, I'm your father. You haven't any mother, haven't had one since you were knee-high—"

"If I had," she retorted bitterly, "I might have a chance to *be* somebody; *get* somewhere—"

"And, skipping a lot of other reasons," Pierre Marshall continued, speaking through her interruption, "and going from beginning to ending: there's one of the final *rights* I have to speak. Look it over."

From a drawer he had unlocked, he drew out a sheet of paper, which he handed her. It was typed under the letterhead of a well-known detective agency. It was a report turned in by one signing himself: "Operative 288"; and it concerned a certain "Robert Cushing Benham."

"That's the gentleman I so unceremoniously ejected to-night before you could get down to see him again," commented her father in the same grim tone. "Not that there was any argument about the ejection. I simply asked him to glance over that sheet of paper as I'm asking you to. It seemed to be convincing. You heard what I said to him as you came down the stairs?"

"Yes," was her tearful response, "you told him if you ever caught him on your property again you'd have him arrested for trespassing. How can you make me look so ridiculous; how can you? 'Have him arrested for trespassing'—"

"It's nothing to the way he'd have made you look if he'd ever had any authority over you. Read his record, my girl. Can't you see from what it says that the man is nothing but a wastrel living on his family's reputation and his only prospect in life is marrying some silly little fool like you—"

"Thank you!" she interpolated with icy mien.

"You're welcome, I'm sure. Read on in that report and you'll see his specialty seems to be doing what you would call 'robbing the cradle. How do you like that part

where it tells about how he tried to entangle that little seventeen-year-old schoolgirl taking her out in that hired car with only enough gasoline to get them ten miles from nowhere when, naturally, it stopped?"

"And he hoped, the scoundrel, that by having kept her out until daybreak—it was that before he got her home, thanks to 'losing his way' several times on unfrequented country roads—he'd have her people so scared of her reputation they'd let her marry him and settle something handsome on them. But her father had some gumption, thank heaven, and kicked him out. Only difference between him and me, I kicked him out before he could get you into any compromising position—"

"How do you know it *wasn't* an accident?" responded Corinne hotly. "These detectives make their living turning in reports like this—"

"Yes, and if they couldn't prove what they said they'd find themselves inside a penitentiary for criminal libel," returned her father wearily. "But to satisfy your mind, the head of this agency used to hold high rank in the secret service. And the man on this case was one of his most trusted government assistants. The same man investigated your other four friends. Here's his reports on them."

He brought a manila envelope out of the same drawer, and drew from it a number of thin, tough sheets of closely typed paper, each headed with the name of the former Secret Service chief.

"I never meant to tell you about it," he said sternly. "I chose to let you think the other four had simply quit coming of their own free will. But I had every one of them investigated, and when the reports turned out to be bad—as I expected from the looks of those particular gentlemen—I just called each one in, in turn, and warned him off. Race-track gamblers, spongers on their friends, eyesores to their families—"

"Oh! Oh!" she broke out again. "To think of having my friends shadowed by detectives! How could you do such a thing?"

"To save you from being made a fool of, instead of waiting until it was too late," he replied concisely.

"As if I couldn't take care of myself! To be treated like a baby, an infant in arms. To—"

"Don't look like you knew how to take care of yourself very well," was his acid response. "If, after reading those reports you still think they were courting you and not your father's money, why, I think I'll have your head examined."

"So," she said, a dangerous glitter in her eye as she pushed back the reports unread, "you think I have no attractions of my own? You think that every one who comes to see me does so on account of your money? Well, I'll show you! I've a good mind to walk straight out of this house and marry the very first man I meet. I've—"

If the glitter in her eye had been dangerous, his was considerably more so.

"Now, see here, my good girl," he said, trying to keep his voice even, although the veins in his temples were swelling to bursting point. "I've let you have your own way for a long, long time, and now you've come to the end of your rope. I'm not going to interfere with your social engagements—parties, dances, and dinners. But you'll be provided with a car and a chauffeur all your own to take you *to* them and *from* them. I don't mean *my* car or *my* chauffeur. And I don't mean the car you drive yourself. I mean a new closed car that I shall buy for you to-morrow, a sedan, where the chauffeur sits on the inside and hears every blessed word of talk that goes on between you and anybody that's with you. And, instead of a regular chauffeur, I shall hire one of those drivers employed by the very detective agency that made those reports."

"What?" gasped Corinne, the full enormity of his intentions beginning to dawn on her.

"That driver," he pursued, inflexibly, "will be your only escort to and from your dinners and your dances and your parties and your theaters, unless you go with a crowd. Accidents will happen, of course, and there may be times when you can't get out of having some man insist on his escort home. I understand that. But, remember, every word that passes between you will be heard by that chauffeur, and reported to me

along with the man's identity. And if the same man insists on escorting you more than a couple of times in a month—why, he'll hear from me, that's all—"

"You must be insane," she burst out. "Trying to make me a laughing stock? Why, I—"

"Trying to keep you from *being* a laughing stock, until you learn better sense. Remember, under the laws of this State, you're not of age until you're twenty-one. And during that time you're responsible *to* me, and I'm responsible *for* you. So, considering the bad taste you've shown in selecting your suitors—five bad eggs in six months—for the next year you're not going to *have* any suitors. Maybe the next one you pick, after the year's up, will be a good egg for a change. If he isn't—well, we'll talk about that when the time comes. Meanwhile, I've made up my mind for the following year. Make the best of it."

She looked at him, stunned.

"You—you can't mean it!"

"Can't I?" he answered with a return of his grim look. "Well, you just try having another man calling on you for the next year—that's all. If you think it's wise, send word you're in when the next one calls. But I warn you: for his sake as well as your own, you'd better send down word you're *out*. That's all!"

He got up and stalked heavily from the room, leaving the stricken girl sitting there.

## CHAPTER II.

### A SQUIRREL INTERVENES.

**T**HUS the period of prohibition began and continued for three weeks, until a certain morning on the bridle path in the park. Even then the violation of the prohibition was unintentional on Corinne's part.

She had always ridden. Now she rode more than before, since she was aware that her new chauffeur had been hired from the detective agency on the day after the quarrel; at which time the new sedan car was bought. More, she was aware that this new driver-operative had orders to follow her in her father's roadster whenever she

took out her own double-seater for a drive by herself.

The fellow made no particular attempt to hide this fact; he never obtruded, but she knew he was always there. But, although she was angry with, and sullenly defiant of, her father, there was no particular man she wanted to meet clandestinely—as yet. None of the five reported upon had touched her heart. They had been conveniences merely—automatons useful to escort her to dances and to theaters; no more.

And if the others whom she knew could not call upon her, she did not fancy any of them enough to take chances of being gossiped about for meeting them in hotel corridors or corner drug stores. She took to reading the new books, seeing the new plays, and riding of mornings. Morgan Evans, her new chauffeur, could not follow her on the bridle-path. At all events, he had no orders to attempt to do so; evidently her father thought her matutinal gallops harmless enough.

So, after early chocolate, while most of her friends still slept off their late dances, and the remainder of the city was on its way to work, she would mount Red Star, head for the long stretches of the park, give the spirited Arab his head, and go galloping full tilt for a five-mile run.

One particular morning—perhaps the most particular of all the mornings of her life—she was on her way back from such a run, almost out of the park, in fact, when an unusual happening enchaind her attention. Here, where the bridle path was almost paralleled by the city street, a number of hoodlums were gathered, making a great deal of noise, throwing a great many stones, and in general making a nuisance of themselves.

Suddenly, to her horror, as she came nearer she saw that the stones were being thrown at a little lame squirrel. They had circled about it in such a way that it could not scurry off into the underbrush to some sort of safety. Whenever it darted to one side of the road a stone drove it back. When it turned and hurled its little body at a tree, it was only to fall back again from sheer inability to hold on.

Another frenzied attempt to escape by the ground would again be frustrated by the grinning hoodlums. Only their superlatively poor aim saved the little creature from being maimed or killed outright. Corinne, as soon as she saw what was happening, slid from her saddle and, reins in hand, rushed forward. But before she could interfere another and a stronger personality had made itself felt.

Young Mr. Randolph Beatty, on his way to the office, turned out of an adjoining path, and saw, too. Without words he swung on his heel and connected with the point of the nearest hoodlum's jaw. As the next to the nearest turned, he got a straight left under the ear, stumbled over his fallen friend, and pitched over backward.

"Damn cowards!" quoth young Mr. Beatty, and strode toward the lame squirrel, which had just fallen back, exhausted from its dozenth attempt to climb a tree. It tried to bite young Mr. Beatty as he picked it up, but it was a very young squirrel, and Randolph's tough dog-skin gloves defeated its milk teeth and its intentions.

"Damn cowards!" he reiterated, eying the squirrel's persecutors balefully. "What is that? Anybody say anything?"

Apparently no one had. The hoodlums shuffled off on their various ways, led by the two recipients of his fistic prowess.

"Oh, let me, please!" entreated Corinne, stretching out her hands, utterly forgetful of Red Star, whose reins fell from them as she reached. Randy Beatty turned quickly; he had been unaware of her presence. She repeated her request.

"Look out! The little devil bites," he warned, as he acceded to it, and placed the trembling little squirrel in her hands. "Oh—look out!" he repeated suddenly, as the teeth fastened on a tightly gloved finger, and she gave a little squeal of pain.

Her sudden cry, following his, was one too many for Red Star, already excited by the fighting. He turned, curveting. A forefoot became entangled in the reins. Red Star kicked at it, only entangling himself the more.

The horse began to whinny in fright, a red film crossing the whites of his eyes as he kicked and plunged.

"Get out of the way," ordered Randolph Beatty sternly, pushing Corinne from the bridle path. It was well for her that she was with some one who knew horses and who was unafraid, for Red Star had whipped himself into a frenzy and was plunging and kicking like some wild stallion just brought in from the range.

Eyes on the horse's small but dangerous steel-shod hoofs, Randolph Beatty circled him warily; then, plunging in at an opportune moment, released the entangled hoof. Without hesitation he followed this up by seizing the bridle while he used the other hand to throw the reins back in place.

Even as he did this, he knew the spirited Arab was in a panic, and that there was but one follow-up to all this. So, shifting his hold from bridle to saddle, he threw himself upward, holding the reins and a handful of the horse's mane with his other hand. With a foot in one stirrup, the other stirrup swinging, Beatty kept his seat as the graceful steel-shod hoofs drummed out a wild farewell to Corinne.

Red Star, head lowered, nostrils snorting out smoky puffs of hot breath on the winter air until he looked like some horse of diabolic myth, tore along the woodland path, headed for the streets and home.

"Oh, he'll be killed—he'll be killed!" moaned the girl. But she meant the man, not Red Star.

The squirrel, the cause of it all, lay quiet in her two hands. She had forgotten him. She was watching his savior.

Randolph had two alternatives. Either he must turn the horse before it plunged into the city traffic—turn him completely and let him run out his fright—or else he must fight him then and there. He tried the first, but only succeeded in having Red Star shy terrifically, almost unseating him and hurling him against the nearest tree. Then Randy knew he must try the second, for the city streets were ever nearer. Once precipitated into the swirl of motors, street cars, omnibuses and the like, with a frightened runaway horse, only the most frightful sort of end must ensue.

Corinne, running and panting after him, saw the superb battle. Without spurs, without even proper riding breeches that would

give his knees a chance to grip as they should, Randy fought Red Star. Corinne saw him, literally standing up in his stirrups, the snaffle abandoned, the curb rein drawn tighter, ever tighter, as both hands slowly forced the horse's head around. Head once turned, he let the curb chain slacken, and the infuriated horse took *his* turn at standing up, shaking his forefeet in air, pawing and snorting like a demon.

When he came down it was four-legged and with a terrific thump. Then he threw his heels in air. Randolph had caught him by the mane when he reared, and had managed somehow to keep his hold when the animal bucked. Bronchos might have taken lessons in bucking from Red Star. Several times the man seemed to slide on his nose along his mount's neck.

He let out another handful of curb rein, and Red Star, with a mighty leap in air, started down the woodland path again in the direction from whence he had come.

Corinne had watched the struggle between man and beast, her heart thumping, her forehead wet with perspiration for all the winter cold. Now, when Red Star swept by like the very wind itself, she clutched at her throat. It was frightful, yet somehow glorious—the sight of that exhausted boy, his coat streaming out behind him, his hat gone, his hair in his eyes, both stirrups swinging, riding like a jockey, his knees gripping the horse's withers almost at saddle level, his face buried in the mane. He showed no sign of giving up!

The sound of the thudding hoofs died away as she stood there. Mechanically she unbuttoned one of the big patch pockets of her heavy tweed riding coat, and thrust the lame squirrel into it, rebuttoning the pocket. Then she turned, too, pausing to pick up the boy's hat and overcoat where he had dropped them before he mounted. In the anxiety and fear that followed the tense excitement of the fight something was born within Corinne—something to which, for all her previous flirtations, she had hitherto been a stranger.

When, a few moments later, she heard the returning thud of hoofs, and then saw, as they turned a curve the steady rise and fall of the man in the saddle, as the horse

trotted beneath him, she breathed a prayer of thankfulness.

"He's all right now," wheezed Randy as he dismounted.

As boy and girl stood, eye to eye, a steady look from him set her pulses to beating faster, if possible.

"How can I thank you—for—for everything?" she began breathlessly. "Oh, I don't know how to tell you how much I admire your courage and pluck and—"

"Please don't," he panted unhappily.

"But I must. At least, I can't. But I must try," she said confusedly. "If I only knew how to show how grateful—"

"You can," he gasped out, but in his eyes was the same steady look. "That is, I—I—I don't want you to be grateful. But if anything I did makes you li-like—like me a little, I'm glad. Because I want to ask a great favor. I want you to let me see you again."

He had spoken with the utmost simplicity. There was no hint of the flirtatious in his earnest manner as he stood there, out of breath, disheveled, torn, yet forgetful of all this and of the cold as well, not even putting on the hat and coat she had handed him. Sincerity begets sincerity, and she answered without thinking:

"Oh, I want to see you again, too."

Then she blushed.

"I'd stay now and talk to you," he went on in the same earnest way, "but I'm due at the office now, and I'll be awfully late as it is, for I shall have to go home and change my clothes. So, if you won't think it a liberty, or presuming on what's happened, I'd like to make an engagement. My name is Randolph Beatty," he added, "and I'm from Tidewater, Virginia. You could write and ask about me. Write the Episcopal rector at St. Mary's; he christened me.

"You'll find there's—well, no reason you shouldn't know me," he concluded awkwardly. "Only, New York's such a place—nobody knows anybody. I might be Lord knows how long getting some one to introduce us."

"My name is Corinne Marsh," she answered, deleting the ultimate syllable of her name. While he had been talking she had

decided on her course. Her father's statement that her suitors had come to see, not Corinne, but "old man Marshall's heiress," had bitten deep. The thought had remained with her that she could never tell when it was herself who was admired rather than her father's money.

Here was the chance to find out. This frank-eyed boy, who had won her admiration so quickly by his fearlessness, and whose appearance and manners were so decidedly attractive, had struck a spark that none of the others had kindled. She wanted to be sure he wanted to see *her*, and her alone.

Moreover, her father's ukase that she could have no one to call on her made it necessary that they should meet in secret, anyhow. That gave her a good excuse for pretending to be some one else—some one who had nothing to give a man except herself.

First, however, the horse must be explained.

"I—I must be getting back to the academy, too," she went on. "You know, I'm employed by a riding academy to give lessons to young ladies, and to get horses accustomed to park riding for them. This one is new at it; I'll have a good deal of practice for him yet. He's easily scared."

She had been watching Randy carefully, and she detected immediate relief when she spoke of her employment. It seemed as if a barrier had been swept away when he spoke again.

"Well, that's fine," he said heartily. "I would like that job myself. I was brought up with horses. But only rich people can afford them in the city. It must be nice to combine work and pleasure as you do. But you haven't told me where I shall meet you, Miss Marsh, and when. I'm off at five in the evenings."

"I'm sorry I have no place of my own to invite you to," she said. "You know how it is in New York, with people who have to work—a single room in a decent neighborhood's about all I can afford. But there's a little tea shop near the academy, and near my place, too. I could meet you there almost any afternoon by the time you get uptown—say at five thirty. I have to

be at the riding academy at night, off and on," she added hastily, "giving lessons, you know."

She gave the address.

"To-ni—to-morrow, then?" he asked somewhat wistfully.

She saw, to her great joy, that he would have asked for that very day, had he dared. She accepted gracefully, and he helped her to mount again. A movement in her pocket reminded her.

"The little squirrel's there," she said gayly. "I'm going to have him looked after at the Bide-a-Wee Home. It's only right. He introduced us. I owe him something."

And, with a gay laugh, noting the flush of pleasure that came to his cheek, she touched Red Star's flank and was off—off to Pat Monahan's stables and fashionable riding school to warn the old Irishman, devoted to her since the days of childhood when she guided her little sheltie around his tan bark, that, should any one inquire, he employed Miss Corinne Marsh as a teacher of riding.

She also stopped, on her way home, at the residence of a former maid, whom she still employed for sewing, to secure from her a key with which she could admit herself to the maid's house whenever young Mr. Beatty insisted on seeing her "home." She explained to the maid that she lived there, in case of inquiries. Corinne inherited her father's thoroughness.

"Now, daddy, we shall just see," she thought defiantly, when these arrangements were concluded. "We'll see if I can't have a man admire me for myself—and if I can't see him when I choose."

### CHAPTER III.

#### OLD PIERRE SCENTS MYSTERY.

THE course of "true love" ran "smoothly" enough for another month, and might have continued to do so, had it not been for Mr. C. Sylvester Donaldson. Young Mr. Donaldson believed in the "cave-man" type of wooing. Meeting Corinne for the first time at a dance, some twenty-nine days after her en-

counter with Randy in the park, and unconscious of the fact that another was in the race for her heart, he did not ask her if he might accompany her home that night. He simply came.

Corinne, unfortunately, was too polite to humiliate him before her new chauffeur when he crowded into her car. She found cause to regret her toleration when, the following afternoon, instead of asking her if he might call, he simply called. Both facts being reported to her father, Pierre Marshall drew some erroneous conclusions. Had he heard the exhortation young Mr. Donaldson received when Corinne came down he would not have summoned Morgan Evans, made certain inquiries, and thus stumbled on a false trail.

Before he asked Evans any questions at all he expected to find in her actions something suspicious.

And he found it!

"You say you've left Miss Marshall in the afternoons at various young ladies' houses during the past month, and that, each time, she's said she would be there several hours, and you weren't to wait in the cold because she'd take a taxi home? H-m. Such consideration from her is almighty suspicious. How many times did that happen?"

Evans began checking off on his fingers, and said, as far as he could remember, about a dozen times, maybe.

Old Pierre rang for Simpkins, the butler, and demanded to know at what hour Miss Corinne had returned the previous afternoon. Being informed, "just in time for dinner," he desired, in an ominous voice, to be informed how often this had happened lately.

"Lots of times, sir," answered Simpkins, trembling. "She's changed a lot in the past few weeks. Used to take all hours to dress with her maid helping her. Now she does it in ten minutes—sometimes without a maid. Did it last night, sir, again."

"How about this, Evans?" asked old Pierre in a voice of thunder.

"I took her to a *matinée* at the Unique, sir," returned the operative-chauffeur. "She said I wasn't to call afterward, as her lady friends were taking her to tea."

"H-m! Show out twenty minutes to five, dare say; but she doesn't return until three hours later. How often did you leave her at shows and she tell you that?"

Evans thought, perhaps, half a dozen times.

"That's about eighteen afternoons she disappears for three hours. I'll be damned if she isn't up to something. Now, listen to me, Evans. I'll see a watch is kept on her so that whenever she goes out you'll be notified in time to bring the car around. And I'll tell her myself I insist on her using it. The very next time she tells you you're not to wait, whether it's at a theater or at a girl's house, you wait, anyhow. If it's the theater, park where you can leave the car and watch all entrances and exits. -If it's at a house, park around the corner and watch for her to come out, and follow her wherever she goes. When you do that, try to discover who's with her without letting her know she's watched. Then, when you have found out both things—where she goes and whom she meets—report back to me."

"Very good, sir."

As a result of this maneuver, Evans returned to the Marshall house the next evening a little after six and sent word by Simpkins that he wanted to see Mr. Marshall.

He was directed to go up to that gentleman's dressing room. There, before a fire of sea coal in a Renaissance fireplace, wearing a gorgeous Persian silk dressing gown with slippers to match lined with Persian lambs' wool, sat Pierre Marshall, the aroma from a long panatella cigar between his teeth filling the room.

"Lock the door. Take one of these specials of mine." He pushed the plain white-banded box of cigars toward the operative. "Sit down, and take your time," he said.

I left her at Miss Grayson's again, but instead of coming back, as she told me, I did what *you* told me. She came out in fifteen minutes or less, and looked up and down the street carefully. However, I was well bidden, so it didn't matter. Then she set off on foot, me following.

From the distance I had to keep, I saw her meet a gentleman outside the en-

trance of a little tea shop. They went in. I came up and managed to peer in, between the curtains, in such a way as not to attract attention. The man's back was to me, but from what I saw of that young Donaldson the other night, I shouldn't be surprised if it was he. From the distance when I saw him outside, standing, he seemed to be the same height, and from where he sat I could see he had that same kind of crisp almost curly light-brown hair. You told me you did not want her to suspect, so I didn't dare make any closer inspection—"

Pierre Marshall bounced out of his chair. "I knew it was that damned young Donaldson she was meeting. Well, I'll soon put a stop to *that*. Listen to me, Evans."

Evans listened.

As a result of that interview, young Mr. Beatty waited in vain one afternoon two days later—waited so long that the policeman on fixed post a half block away wondered if the young man was a plainclothes man waiting for some suspect or a suspicious character himself.

It was only after several hours that the young man finally accepted defeat, and repaired to the riding academy to interview old Pat Monahan.

"Sure, Miss Marsh is out of the city for a few days," said the old Irishman with ready mendacity, when the case was made plain to him.

Privately he was sorry for this good-looking, well-mannered boy, and wroth with his young lady for having taken him up only to drop him.

He determined to warn her by telephone that, unless she played fair, he intended to expose the whole box of tricks. But when he attempted to reach Corinne by phone he found that more difficult than he had imagined.

One voice over the wire asked him to wait; a second voice demanded to know who it might be who wanted Miss Marshall. Monahan recognized the second voice as Pierre Marshall's—recognized also the danger note in it—and decided it would not be wise to go into too many details. He did not know why; he simply sensed it. Men who spend a good part of their lives

with animals often develop this sense of danger.

"Just say it's a friend," he answered cautiously.

"That won't do," came in Pierre Marshall's crispest tones. "I'll have to know who it is wants to speak to her before I can call her to the telephone."

"Never mind, then," returned Pat, and hung up.

## CHAPTER IV.

### RANDY DECIDES TO ACT.

ON the following morning Randy Beatty, arriving dispiritedly at the office, found a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting that sent his pulses leaping. He had left Monahan's to go to the address which he believed was the girl's home, and where she had written "Marsh" above the name of her former maid. Here he heard an entirely different story from Monahan's. The flustered seamstress had told the first lie that came into her head.

Because of this conflicting testimony and the broken engagement, Randy Beatty, in the course of a sleepless night, had discovered just how much he had cared for the girl he had known so short a time. Next morning, at sight of the letter, he knew at once it was from her.

Everything would be explained now—quite satisfactorily. He would see her again, and this time he would say what he had to say without further ado; tell her he loved her and ask her to marry him. But when he had read the letter he saw it was not going to be so easy. It consisted of but a few lines:

Circumstances have made it extremely hard for me to see you. If you will manage to be inside Monahan's academy to-morrow—the day after you receive this—morning by eight o'clock, and will hide upstairs in the harness room, I will try to see you and explain.

Show this to Monahan when you come, and he will arrange it for you. Tell him not to let any one else know you are there.

CORINNE

Randy Beatty stared at the note, and stared and stared and stared again. What it signified he had not the slightest idea.

He felt like a young man in a mystery serial. He had read of such situations, and had seen many more at the movies, but had hardly believed they were to be encountered in real life.

Once he realized this was real, he broke out into a fever of fright for her safety. He did not wait, but hurried off to Monahan's at lunch time, to make his arrangements for the morrow, and to inquire if any further news of her was to be had.

Old Pat shook his head gravely, remembering the voice at the other end of the telephone.

"You'd best be stepping carefully, me lad," he warned. "Ye're getting into deeper wathers than ye know about. And if th' young miss don't tell you about the same to-morrow, 'tis meself that will. I'll have no further hand in it, that I won't."

Persuasions were vain, so far as learning any more from him at the moment. Randolph left, even more puzzled and troubled than when he had entered. It seemed as if the hours between noon and morning would never come to an end. Needless to say, he did very little sleeping that night, and had bathed, shaved, dressed, and was on the street next morning long before there was any occasion for him to be there. Even the stables attached to the riding academy had not yet opened when he arrived there, although there were many early riders. It was not until he found them closed that he remembered he had not had any breakfast.

He repaired to a near-by lunch room and ate something hurriedly, although there was no actual need of hurrying. The place had barely opened when he returned. He repaired to the harness room upstairs with a morning paper and waited.

The waiting seemed interminable. He could not read his paper; he could only sit, at a discreet angle, and watch the street. Finally the car containing Corinne appeared. She got out and ran into the riding academy, while the car drove away. She burst into the room, all in a flurry.

Randy had risen to meet her. Now, without realizing that he had never addressed a word of love to her in his life, nor had any assurance of affection from her in

return, he stepped toward her with a glad cry and caught her into his arms.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," he almost choked, "how you've worried me, and how I love you! I didn't know how much until I waited for you and worried about you." He held her tight and kissed her. Then, almost as an afterthought, he added: "You do love me, don't you?"

She wriggled out of his arms with a sound that was half laugh, half cry. "That's a funny question to ask after what I've just let you do to me. Do you think I'd let any man I'd known such a short time hold me in his arms and kiss me if I didn't love him? Oh, my dear, yes, I'm afraid I do love you."

"Afraid you do?"

"Afraid, yes! But we must hurry; we haven't much time. Didn't you notice my chauffeur was in riding clothes, too?"

"I didn't notice anything but you, dear, and—"

She held him off.

"Wait! It's wonderful to lie in your arms like that, but we haven't the time. He's only gone to put the car in the garage around the block; then he'll be back to accompany me on my ride to see that I don't meet anybody. That's why I couldn't meet you the day before yesterday. My father's got on to our meetings somehow—"

"Your father! But you let me think—"

"I was an orphan earning my own living. I know. Well, I'm neither. I lied to you because—because, Randy, I was so tired of having men around me who wanted a chance to marry my father's dollars. And the opportunity of meeting some one who didn't know who I was and whom I liked from the first—"

"Did you, darling?"

"I certainly did, from the very first, when you fought for poor little Bebe—"

"Bebe?"

"That's the squirrel's name. It's a she-squirrel. It's back from the Bide-a-Wee, all healed, and it has a little house all its own on my window sill. But, goodness, I can't stop to tell you any more this morning, when I don't know how long he'll take. I mustn't let his suspicions be aroused."

"Whose?"

"This chauffeur's. He isn't a chauffeur at all, but some sort of a detective hired to watch me. You see, father's forbidden me to have any men calling on me even for a year, as I am not of age. But, darling, I can't stay here any longer, I'm afraid. Be here to-morrow morning at the same time, and I'll try to tell you more. We'll know how long it takes him to garage the car, then."

He caught her in his arms. This time hers went about his shoulders and she held up her face to be kissed. Then, with a little laugh of happiness, she was gone.

It was not until several mornings had passed that Randolph Beatty gathered the true state of affairs. It took some time for Corinne to admit that her father had been justified in investigating the antecedents of her previous suitors, although there had been nothing "between" any of them and herself.

"But, of course, he couldn't know that," she admitted. "And now he looks on me as such a fool that he simply won't allow me to have any man calling. As I said, he's found out about our meeting, although, somehow, he thinks you're a fool named Sylvester Donaldson, who's been trying to force himself upon me."

"So I didn't let on—just let him think you were. And now he's gone and hired another detective to watch the house and grounds, to see that I don't slip out without any one knowing about it. And here's this one, Evans, to drive me everywhere and ride behind me."

"I'm not allowed to go anywhere that he can't wait for me with the car, and no man is allowed to ride in it with me. My father's serious, dearest. He swears if I don't obey him in this he'll pack me off to a convent until my twenty-first birthday, and I'm not twenty yet. So this is our only chance of seeing each other for a few moments every morning."

"No," said Randolph Beatty grimly. "That's no way to go on with our love. Why, you'd soon tire of the man who hadn't even enough manliness to be able to see his girl in the open. No. You've got to marry me."

"Marry you! But how can I?"

"You can, well enough. All you've got to do is to walk right out of here to-morrow morning with me and be married. Come on. What d'you say?"

She caught her breath in a little gasp of disappointment.

"Oh, I'd like to!" she breathed. "But I couldn't—I couldn't. You see, I've given my word of honor. That man Evans was going to park the car in the street and leave it here the first morning, unless I gave him my word of honor I wouldn't attempt to run off while he took it to the garage. And every morning he still makes me give him my word of honor. I couldn't break that."

Randy's forehead wrinkled.

"No," he agreed grumblingly, "you couldn't do that."

"And yet this is the only chance I get to see you," she wailed. "Oh, it does seem so cruel! What can we do?"

"We've got to do something," he returned sternly. "My self-respect won't permit this sort of thing to go on. I love you, and you love me, and I want you to marry me. There's nothing to be ashamed about in that, is there? I didn't even know your father had any dollars when I first asked you to marry me; and I don't need any of them now."

"Don't you, Randy?"

"No, I don't," he returned sturdily—"not if you're willing to live on what I make, which isn't so bad, in my opinion. If we live outside the city we can even afford a car—a small one you drive yourself, understand; no limousines or chauffeurs. I wonder if you're willing, though?"

She looked at him reproachfully.

"You know I am, or I wouldn't love you very much, would I?"

He agreed as to that. "Now, the only thing is to figure out how to get you where we can be married. You say there's no chance of your slipping away?"

"No," she replied, "because, whenever I go to see any one, the car waits outside for me, and my father has compelled me to give my word that, if he allows me to go to theaters, dances, and the like, I will make no attempt to leave before the car comes for me. It is like it is here this morning.

If I do not give my word I'm not permitted to go. My father knows he can trust me when I give my word. And I know if I broke it to him, I might break it to you—to anybody. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," he admitted, "that's true enough. Well, there's only one thing to do then. We must elope from your house some night."

"But how can we?" she asked, with a little cry. "That detective is on duty there. I never know when he is asleep, and his room is directly over mine. And this other man, Evans, is in the garage."

"Never mind," said Randolph Beatty, taking her in his arms. "When you come to-morrow morning, bring the plan of the house with you. Make a sketch of it for me with the location of the various rooms—yours, your father's—every one's. Meanwhile, I'll manage to get a good look at the place from the outside. I'll go there pretending to be a book agent or something, and get a chance to look the ground over. You just leave things to me, little girl."

From the trustful look in her eyes as she raised them, you might have imagined young Mr. Beatty was some conquering general instead of merely the office manager at Johnson and Selkirk's, Incorporated, wholesale teas, coffees, and spices.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GREAT PLAN.

IT was two mornings later when the final scene for the great elopement was finally settled upon. The morning before Corinne had brought the rough plan of the Marshall house interior. She already knew that Randy had visited the house on the previous afternoon, for from her second-story window she had seen him in the dusk coming up the graveled walk, a leather dispatch case under one arm and a parcel of books under the other.

She had lost sight of him under the portico; but, a few moments later, had seen him come down the stone steps and cross the lawn toward the garage. She had hurried to a hall window and had caught another sight of him in conversation with Ri-

## HER FATHER'S CONSENT.

ley, the garage man. He was arguing and spreading out printed "literature" taken from the dispatch case.

Riley proving obdurate, Randy had followed the hedge around to the back of the house. Evidently he had asked Riley where the servants' entrance was, and was on his way there. From another coign of vantage, at her bathroom window on the other side of the house, Corinne was presently given a sight of her lover trudging from the rear to the front again. He had thus completely circled the house and grounds and made himself as familiar with the Marshall exterior as was possible in one visit. He had returned again, that night, for a short visit of inspection.

After giving him her rough sketch the next morning, she left with his assurance that everything would now be arranged nicely. She did not see him on his second or third trip to the house; in fact, no one saw him, for he did not enter the grounds at either time, and he waited until dark before coming. Since the elopement was to occur at night, he wanted some assurance as to the lay of the land under the starlight. Now that he knew whose rooms they were, he could plan better the second night than the first.

Although a bitterly cold wind had sprung up after dark, Randy spent the evening in the open, watching the Marshall house from various outlying points. Several times he found it necessary to retreat to the drug store down the adjoining block and warm himself with hot chocolate before he could continue his watch.

Each time he returned he took up a place at a different angle. He saw the lights extinguished in Mr. Marshall's room at a little after ten. In the detective's, above Corinne's, they remained lit until well on to midnight. Evans evidently remained awake until long after that; his light was not extinguished until close to one.

Even when Randy took his leave, Corinne's still glowed. She was having a hard time to sleep these days, as the pile of new novels on her little marquetry night table testified, along with the pile of pillows that propped up her head as she lay reading by the rose-pink-shaded electric lamp.

But that was her last night of sleeplessness, he assured her the following morning. His plans were perfected now. That night they would be together, whirling on their way to Greenwich, Connecticut, where they could be married at any hour without a license. After that—their honeymoon.

"Oh, Randy, darling!" she breathed as they clung together in the old harness room. "Do you think—are you sure—you can do it?"

"Leave it to me," he returned, grandly. "All you have to do is to be ready dressed by eleven, say, and wait. Have your bag all packed—"

"I couldn't get everything I needed in one bag," she protested. "I'll have to bring two, at the very least; maybe three. You know father is liable to be so angry he won't send my trunk at all. So I'd better take—"

"All right, all right," he interrupted, hurriedly. "We haven't got any too much time, so listen. This is the way I have it fixed. That second detective, the one with the room above yours, makes a sort of inspection of the grounds before he goes to bed. I don't know what *he* calls it, but he comes out and strolls down to the gate and back to the garage, and goes in there and stays about five minutes or so—speaks to Evans, I suppose.

"Then he comes out and goes in the house by the back way. Now what is going to happen to him is this: I'm going to be waiting in the shadows just outside the front door—between the inner doors and the storm doors—and when he comes out two things are going to happen to him."

"What?" she asked excitedly.

"Well, first, he's going to trip over a rope I'll have fastened across between the two foot-scrapers in the vestibule. Before he can recover from the shock of his fall I'll be sitting on his shoulders pressing a chloroform sponge to his nostrils. Oh, I've looked it all up; it won't be enough to do him any real harm, only make him unconscious.

"At the same moment I press the sponge to his nose, I'll shove a handful of raw cotton in his mouth, in case of him making any outcry. He's a good big hefty fellow, but then, so am I, and my weight on his back,

added to the stunning he's had from the fall, will be enough to keep him down until the chloroform takes effect."

Remembering the force her lover had exhibited in his fight with the hoodlums and the subsequent battle with Red Star, Corinne thrilled with pride and excitement.

"Yes," she breathed, reaching out a timid hand to touch her hero who was daring so greatly to win her. He caught it and carried it to his lips. "Yes? And then—"

"Then," he proceeded, his head thrown back, his eyes shining, "I intend to walk across to the garage just as if I were the other fellow, who, meanwhile, I shall have dragged out of sight and propped up at the extreme end of the dark porch. I noticed the garage door was left unlatched. So I shall walk in and walk heavily up the stairs just as the other fellow does. Riley goes to bed early—about nine thirty—and the other fellow, your father's driver, doesn't get in until all hours, and his room is between Riley's and Evans's. So when I walk into Evans's room and shut the door behind me, quickly, what we have to say won't be likely to be heard by any one fast asleep. So—"

"What *will* you say?" demanded Corinne, breathlessly.

"Well, I'll have slipped a half mask on before I enter the room, and I'll have my revolver in one hand and a pair of handcuffs in the other. Evans will doubtless take me for some desperate burglar, and I'll speak gruffly and act just as though I were."

"Put up your hands!" I'll say. 'Now turn around. Now bring your hands together behind you and put the wrists close. No funny business, now,' I'll add, 'this gun has got a Maxim silencer on it.'"

"Where will you get it?" she asked, eagerly interrupting.

"I won't. I'll have a contraption fastened to it that looks like one—comes off a toy Maxim silencer pistol I saw in a shop window one day and remembered when I thought of this. Well, to continue, I'll say

Stick your wrists close together and hold 'em that way. If you make one funny

move, or one attempt to call out, you'll be dead before you know what hits you. The man who's sleeping in that room beyond won't hear a thing. It'll just be a click and—bingo—you're gone! I've used these things before,' I'll add in a sinister sort of tone, 'and they kill as quickly as they kill noiselessly. So don't think you can get away with anything—*anything*.'"

She giggled in appreciation.

"Do you think he'll—"

"I know he will. It's not everybody can face even a drawn revolver leveled at them. But I'll bet that the thought that the thing can kill them without a sound is too much for the strongest nerve. You'll see. Well, when he turns and puts his hands together, I'll put the cuffs on him. Then I'll tie his legs with some strong Manila rope I'll bring, and then I'll gag him, lock the window and the door and put the key in my pocket."

"All this will be about eleven or eleven thirty. The other chauffeur comes in around midnight, or later. The first night I came here late, the same night I visited here in the afternoon before I got your sketch, Muller came in at twelve ten. Last night he hadn't come in at all when I left. I didn't explain about my night trips before for fear it would worry you."

"It would have. But—"

"We haven't any time to waste now. Evans will be back any minute now. From eleven on to-night, be ready and listening for my whistle. Have your window down from the top so you can hear. When you do, take your bags and slip downstairs as noiselessly as possible. I'll be hiding behind the garden hedge, waiting, and I'll leave the garage doors unbolted so, as soon as I see you, I'll push your roadster down off the concrete floor and onto the incline. It'll pick up speed, and the engine will start without noise or use of the starter."

"Then I'll sling your bags in, and you after them, and we'll be off. Be ready to sing out: 'It's all right, Riley,' in case he *should* hear anything. I'd *hire* a car, only, if your father wanted to catch us, that would be an absolute tip-off. Besides, they won't hire out cars without their drivers unless they know you. Tell me; which roadster is yours and which your father's?"

## HER FATHER'S CONSENT.

She described her own hurriedly, for Evans was to be seen approaching down the street. Then, with a quick embrace, and an adjuration on his part: "Keep up your pluck," they parted.

"For the last time," she said.

"That's right," he whispered, "after this we'll be together for good—my little wife!"

He smiled, very well pleased with himself and enraptured with the thought of their future together. Then his face set in grim lines as he realized the serious job yet ahead of him before he won her for good and all. As soon as he heard her and Evans clatter off he set about arranging affairs for the night.

But all day he was haunted by one uneasy thought. Was it, after all, fair to her father; this high-handed abduction of his daughter? Pierre Marshall had only done what he had done to protect Corinne; and, from all that she admitted, Randy was not sure she had not needed that protection. He burned with indignation at the thought of his little girl a prey for idle, languid fortune hunters, who wanted none of her sweetness nor charm, but only the money that would come from her father.

Little by little, ever since she had told him why she was kept under surveillance, he had found himself blaming old Pierre less and less. And on that particular day the disagreeable thought that he would be doing him an injustice persisted. Though he went about his work of preparing for the elopement, buying the properties necessary for staging his little melodrama and obtaining the leave from his office requisite for a honeymoon, that uneasy feeling would not down.

It came to a climax just before the great elopement's machinery was put into action.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE GREATER PLAN.

FOR the third and last time Randy Beatty had, so to speak, taken up an observation post opposite the enemy's trenches. At nine thirty, from various angles, he had begun a third evening of espionage. No doubt beset him as to the ulti-

mate outcome of his scheme. He was gloriously, youthfully, certain that, single-handed, he was going to be able to master those two guardians of his lady's liberty. No fear of accident or slip-up beset him.

He looked upon the entire arrangement almost as a play that had been rehearsed and was bound to go through according to schedule. No, that was not what troubled him.

As he stood there in the cold—snow had begun to fall besides—changing his post occasionally, and once more beginning to think of trips after hot chocolate, all that bothered him was his duty to his future father-in-law.

After all it was a serious matter to snatch away an only child from a father who loved her. While Randy was young and inexperienced enough to think nothing of the fortune he was thereby throwing away, he possessed sufficient decent sentiment to realize it was rather awful, this estranging a father and a daughter forever.

Moreover, he knew, although Corinne was infuriated with old Pierre now; forgetful of the old affection in the new love, the love that had come into her life with him, Randy; she was bound, down deep in her heart, to care a great deal for her father.

And, once she took the irretrievable step, she would soon discover how much her father had meant to her. The heartache that would ensue would do much to militate against their marital happiness.

Randy loved Corinne enough to realize all this. The more he thought of it, the more his indecision increased. He must do something to obviate this thing. He must not start his married life with a handicap. What to do?

He glanced at his wrist watch's radiolite dial. Lord! Only ten after ten. It seemed to him he had been there hours. He wriggled in supreme discomfort, not on account of the cold, but because of his inner emotions.

He looked across at the house. The light in Pierre Marshall's dressing room was not yet lit. No doubt the old gentleman was downstairs, dozing over his evening paper; quite unaware of the awful event

about to befall. Randolph Beatty could not stand the thought of how old Pierre would feel when he awoke to discover his only child gone.

An old man—alone. His last years embittered—his lonely death—

Randy moved in an agony of indecision. He started slowly toward the corner drug store. Then, suddenly, he stopped. With a quick firm step, he crossed the street directly toward the Marshall gate.

Randy had come to a sudden decision. Pierre Marshall should have his warning anyhow. He should know with whom he had to deal; know that a decent enough fellow loved his daughter and wanted her for his wife. He, Randy, did not blame him for his opposition to the fortune hunters. He was perfectly willing to be investigated himself.

*And he would tell him so!*

Without making any reference to the proposed elopement, he would inform Pierre Marshall who and what he was, and why he wanted his daughter for his wife. Then, if Pierre chose to be unreasonable, let it fall on his own head.

Randy did not doubt that he *would* be unreasonable after all that had happened. But, at least, that would be open war, then. He would not be fighting in the dark. Pierre would at least know that the fellow his daughter had eloped with was no skulker; nor yet any blackguard who was marrying Corinne with the hope of extorting some of her father's dollars afterward.

Under such circumstances there was a chance of reconciliation later. The other way there would have been none; the two households would have been inexorably unreconcilable. This way—

It was worth trying, anyhow. If he loved her it was the only decent thing to do. If he loved her it was his duty to think of her future happiness.

He crossed the street, opened the gate, walked up the graveled walk and rang the bell. He did not know that, as he passed through a patch of light cast by the two white globes whose pillars guarded the gate of the garden, he had been observed by Corinne from her second-story aerie, where her face was glued to the pane, watching.

A moment later she heard the doorbell ring, and felt a sharp stab of pain at her heart. Noiselessly she glided over the thick velvet pile of the upper-hall carpet and came half down the stairs—down to where they turned. She had taken the precaution of extinguishing the light behind her, so that there would be no shadow cast.

Then, from where she stood, she saw Simpkins's assistant, a tall young footman named Albert, answer the door, and heard the voice she loved best asking for her father.

"Oh, God!" she gasped, wondering what terrible thing had happened to upset his plans. Recent fiction she had read supplied material for her fears. Had Evans discovered her duplicity at the riding academy and installed a dictograph that had revealed Randy's plot? Was her lover, even now, under surveillance with the chance of possible arrest—"for trespassing," say—as her father had threatened Robert Benham?

She stood like something frozen, until, in her darkness, she saw Albert in the light bringing Randy to the door of the downstairs library and ushering him in.

She slipped down after Albert had shut the door. But the walls and doors of the Marshall house were thick, built to stand, and, with the tapestries and the thickness of the carpets, not so much as a confused murmuring reached her ears.

So she crept away, like some hunted thing that has been trapped at last; crept back to her bedroom and threw herself face-downward on her bed, sobbing pitifully; she, who until then, had been in anticipation, the happiest girl in the city.

Had she heard what was happening she might have been spared something of her fears for the man she loved. But she had not forgotten her father's threat to "do an injury" to him who should come next in the effort to win his daughter's affections.

What happened would have surprised her.

When Pierre Marshall looked up from the reports he had been trying to read without his reading-glasses—said glasses have been unaccountably mislaid and not found, although Albert and Simpkins had searched the house and were still searching when Randy rang—when he looked up and saw

the frank, pleasant-faced youth, with that air of keen readiness which he liked to see in his own young men at the office, he very naturally mistook him for one of them, sent by Jenkinson, his manager, on some business or the other.

This belief was partly due to the fact that he was minus either pair of glasses, having taken off his long-sight ones to read the reports; and partly due to Randy's air of brisk alertness and the dispatch case he carried. And which contained the various "props" for his little melodrama!

It is true Pierre Marshall did not recognize him. But then there were many hundreds of Marshall employees whom old Pierre knew neither by sight nor name. And Randy had the appearance of the sort of efficient young business man the Marshall offices favored. Besides, had he not sent in his name with such assurance and at such an hour?

"Here," said Pierre Marshall, "you've come just at the right time. Can't find my glasses, damn it! Must have left them at the office. Must get some duplicates. Read these reports for me."

Now "these reports" were the sort of thing that could only be read by a young business man who kept close track of just what the various stocks, listed and unlisted, were doing. For the name of every stock was closely abbreviated until the reports read like cipher, and the columns of figures were not headed in any more understandable manner, and the figures were further complicated by abbreviated additions of descriptive phrases.

Old Pierre did not really expect Randy to be able to read them to him except by rote. He only hoped he could. Even if he only read by rote, however, spelling out the cipher-like abbreviations, that was better than trying to read them with one eye closed and the other squinted.

Not one young man in fifty in his offices could have read them. But Randy, being office manager for a firm whose investments he was supposed to watch and to counsel new ones, had to read such confidential nightly reports from the same firm of investment brokers.

Great, therefore, was Pierre Marshall's

surprise and gratification when the names of stocks and the figures quoted, denoting their probable fall or rise in the near future as well as the following day, quotations from the Bourse, Capel Court, and other foreign exchanges, as well as from Wall Street, plus the probable reasons, were all read off to him as glibly as Jenkinson, or his chief financial clerk himself, could have transcribed them.

So glibly, indeed, were they read, that, without realizing what he was doing, Pierre Marshall asked questions during the reading, and got answers whose keen knowledge of existing financial conditions amazed him. He did Randy the honor of making a number of notes, founded on his answers. When the young man had concluded and was folding the report up, Pierre Marshall rounded on him suddenly:

"Why haven't I seen you before? What are you doing here to-night, anyhow?"

"I came to tell you that I want to marry your daughter," replied the amazing young man quite calmly.

Pierre Marshall fell back in his chair.

"Wh-what did you say?"

"I came to tell you I want to marry your daughter," Randy repeated, quite as calmly, although his heart was thumping against his ribs, and his cheeks were flushed. "And, as I hear you're a great hand at investigating people's pasts, I want you to have mine investigated thoroughly before you give your consent."

Old Pierre Marshall sat limp, staring at him. Finally he managed to say, in what for him was a small voice:

"Who the devil are you, anyway?"

"Office manager and credit man for Johnson and Selkirk, Inc., teas, coffees, and spices."

"How long you been there?"

"All my life, since I left school. Never had any other place. Uncle of mine got me a job there when I left college my first year—couldn't afford to go any longer; had to help bring up the younger ones."

"What did you go there as?" demanded Pierre Marshall, warming to his work. You might have imagined he was hiring this amazing young man for a position at Marshall & Co.'s.

Which in a way he was!

"Office boy," responded the other promptly. "Six dollars a week. Lived on it, too, although it was tough sledding. However, that was over ten years ago, and six dollars then was the same as ten now, or more."

"Started at six, huh? What you getting now?"

"One seventy-five. Quite enough to marry on, I think?"

"So do I," agreed old Pierre Marshall, surprisingly. But then it was a night of surprises. "Enough to marry the right sort of girl, of course. But—"

"I hope you don't mean to intimate that your daughter isn't the right sort of girl," broke in Randy, flushing. "If she marries me, she does it because she loves me; and if she loves me, she certainly doesn't want to injure my self-respect by letting me think that what I earn isn't enough to keep her comfortable. Don't you think so?"

Pierre Marshall eyed him with increasing respect.

"What has *she* got to say about this?"

"Why what I say, naturally," responded Randy, and wondered why his father-in-law-to-be burst into a loud guffaw. "I don't see anything to laugh about," he added, in an injured tone.

"You would, my boy, you would, if you knew that young lady as well as I do. I think your assurance is marvelous. You must have her hypnotized. Didn't she tell you what I promised to ~~do~~ to the next fellow who came around here?"

"Yes, she did," answered Randy, flushing. "And I don't blame you, either, considering the sort you've had to put up with. I want to thank you for protecting her. She's only a kid, and it's natural a girl should have some man hanging around. She isn't like a man—she can't go places by herself; has to have some man take her, you know. And even if she isn't in love, you see, what's more natural than that she should let men come to see her in exchange for them taking her places."

"But she wasn't in love with any of *them*. She didn't want to marry *them*. She *does* want to marry *me*, and I haven't even any social position to give her, let

alone any money—except what I make—or any luxury. She knows I wouldn't take anything from you, because I told her so."

"Why?" demanded Pierre Marshall, interested despite himself.

"Because I want her to realize it's Corinne I want, not your money. I fell in love with her before I knew who she was, you see, and—"

The story of their meeting and the subsequent happenings sprang to his lips and was out before he realized it.

"So there the matter stands," Randy concluded; "and it's only fair to warn you, sir, that if you refuse your consent, we shall manage, somehow, to marry without it."

He had carefully omitted any mention of the proposed elopement. Old man Marshall had had his chance, Randy figured, and if he remained obdurate, the elopement should go forward as originally planned. It was entirely up to her father whether he gave his consent or not.

"What has she to say about *that*?"

"What I say, of—I say, Mr. Marshall, I wish you wouldn't laugh at me like that."

For the second time that night, Pierre Marshall had burst into one of his guffaws.

"I haven't enjoyed myself so much in years," quoth he, wiping the tears from his eyes. "Wait here a moment. If she hasn't gone to bed I'll call her down."

The soft carpet gave no warning of his approach, and he found his daughter, face downward on the bed, her pillow wet with her tears. He looked down at the little crumpled figure and a tender look crept into his eyes.

"Well, daughter," he said, and gathered her into his arms; "do you want something so terribly bad as all that? You're not the crying kind, honey, I know that! Come, tell your old daddy, and he'll try to get it for you."

"I—I want Randy," she sobbed, and buried her tear-stained face on his shoulder. "Oh, father, I want Randy so much! And he's so sweet! You couldn't help but love him if you knew him. I didn't care about the others, daddy, and I'm glad you did what you did; but Randy's—different. I can't live without Randy, daddy. Don't take him away from me! Please!"

A small trembly hand crept upward to pat his face, patted it timidly; all just as it had been when Pierre Marshall was a newly made widower, alone with his baby girl, nearly nineteen years ago.

The remembrance of that motherless infant who had patted his face timidly because he sobbed, brought the moisture to his eyes again—probably for the first time since then, too. And so he caught the little soft hand and held it against his bristly cheek exactly as he had done so long ago, and his voice was choked when he tried to put his emotion into words.

"Why, Pussikins, I—I—I didn't come up here to take him away from you. I came up here to give him to you—"

At her cry of joy, he held up one hand and tried to revert to his old gruff self:

"On one condition, mind. That you don't leave this house. Think I'm going to keep up a house just for myself? Wasting money like that! No, sir: you tell that young man if he wants you he'll have to live here where I can keep my eye on him and know he treats you right—"

Only half of the foregoing was coherent, so smothered was it by her hold about his

neck and the kisses that continually impeded his utterance. Then, without giving him time to recover, she sped off downstairs.

"Oh, Randy, Randy; father is *such* a dear," she cried rapturously. "It was so sweet of you to think of him; I love you twice as much for it, darling—"

She would have thrown herself into his arms; but, for a reason she did not at first understand, he was holding her off, albeit tenderly and with the utmost gentleness.

Following the direction of his eyes, she saw that her father had followed her downstairs, a dazed and bewildered look in his face. He was wondering, I suppose, how it had all happened so suddenly yet withal with his consent.

Then Randolph Beatty put the finishing touch on his amazingness. In Pierre Marshall's own house, in his very own library, his own private sanctum, that astounding young man put an arm about Pierre Marshall's own daughter and gave a significant glance toward the open door.

"If you'll pardon us, sir, for just a few moments—with your kind permission, of course—I—that is—we'd like to be alone."

THE END.



## DRIVERS

AGED he always seemed there on the seat

Of ancient cab drawn by a tired horse,  
To peer for fares along the gaslit street,  
Where tides of urban traffic held their course.

He haunted terminals, the leading source  
For his poor livelihood, and would entreat

With wistful eagerness and gentle force  
For trade through swooning noons and midnight sleet.

Arrayed in uniform with neat puttees,

He swings his taxi through the city ways,  
Youth in his stalwart form and graceful ease,  
Under the great white arcs that coldly blaze.  
No tender startles him, no swift amaze

At journeys singular; one thought to please;

A wealth of worldly knowledge in his gaze,  
To pierce and hold the great town's mysteries.

Thomas J. Murray.



# Crafty Rogues

By **BOICE DU BOIS**

## WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

THE Rev. Bruce de Lisle and his friend Andrew Bailey, in payment of a past debt to Chink-nail Connors, owner of the Cracker Pot Café on the old Bowery of New York City, agree to take over its management while Connors makes a trip to Boston. Connors fears a raid on the part of sailors from Captain Jake's crew, with whom he is involved in a mysterious enterprise, and who has hidden part of his cargo in the cellar of the café. Connors also distrusts his bartender Emile, and Joie the Jug, an habituë.

Connors sinisterly vanishes, and Bruce has just taken over charge of the café when a girl, obviously playing a part and in league with a negro piano player, Eddie Carbon, enters. Shortly afterward a mob of sailors crash open the door of the Cracker Pot and rush in.

## CHAPTER VI.

### CAPTAIN JAKE'S CARGO.

ON they came, a motley crew of heavy-faced ruffians, the scum and dregs from the worst resorts on the river front. They swarmed into the Cracker Pot like human buzzards, and their clamorings gave evidence of the mob spirit that possessed them.

With the momentum derived from numbers, they swept into the little back room, overturning everything in their path.

Glasses tumbled to the floor, and the crack of splintering wood accompanied the crash, as table legs were wrenched loose, that they might serve as convenient clubs in the mêlée that was to follow.

The small group in front of the platform reflected the confusion and uncertainty attendant upon the unexpected onslaught. Bruce had jumped to his feet, dimly conscious of a subtle, energizing force that was sweeping through his blood. He was also conscious of the fact that the young woman had pressed close to him in her terror. Her

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hand was clutching his arm. He could feel the vibrating tremors of fear that were pulsating through her body.

It might have been the peculiar calmness of his mind or the very nearness of the frightened girl that caused him to study her face. At any rate, his quick, searching glance was a revelation. The mask of bravado was gone. The primitive instincts—the registered imprint of quality and blood—had taken its place. She was no longer playing a part. Underneath the drawn distress of that face Bruce traced the lines of refinement and culture.

Bailey was also on his feet, and glanced with apprehension at his friend. If he expected to find fear written across the face of Bruce de Lisle, he was mistaken. In the midst of danger a cowardly man seldom smiles, and Bruce's face bore the impress of a sardonic grin—the smile of a man who is gripping both nerve and muscle for perfect physical control.

He drew near to Bailey, and his words sounded as though they were being ripped out with a cross-cut saw.

"There is a hell, Bailey," said he, "and this is it."

The next instant he was out of his coat, and had thrown it on the platform. He also mounted the first step leading to it. At the entrance to the dance hall the mob paused until their leader worked his way to the front.

He was none other than the juggling sailor.

Bruce noted the great hulking form of the man; the broad nose that had evidently cushioned many a stinging blow; the cauliflowered right ear that had been beaten to a pulp in some fistic encounter. He was an antagonist of no mean powers, to say nothing of his brutal followers.

"Step down," he shouted to Bruce; "step down before we beats out your senses."

The shuffling crowd, now quiet except for their suppressed blusterings, had drawn nearer, but neither Bruce nor Bailey had moved an inch.

"What do you mean, when we gives you a chance to save your skins? Listen—we are here to pull the vitals out of this moldy

crib; to rip out its innards; and like honest men, we gives you a chance to get out." Here he turned to the waiting men behind him. "Gangway, lads—so the pretty boys can run outside and get the air. Stand aside."

With prompt obedience they stepped to the right and left, leaving a broad passage through which Bruce and his friend might have made their exit had they been so minded.

Bruce had quietly stepped down and was leaning on one of the dance-hall chairs. The confident, boisterous sailor was within three feet of him.

"Are you through?" he asked with quiet sarcasm.

"Ah, ha! He sasses his betters, he does!" exclaimed the sailor. "But I hates the sight of blood, so we'll listen to his talk. But I warns you. Jerk it out quick, little bright eyes."

"Save both your time and your breath; we are not going," was Bruce's reply. "Not going—do you get it? This place is under our protection; we stand for law and order, against you and your evil designs. This lady, however, will oblige both of us by leaving at once."

Bruce turned to the terror-stricken young woman at his side.

"Go," he commanded, "for if I mistake not this will be no place for you."

"Hold, deary," leered the big sailor—"not so fast. We be jolly lads, and would bespeak your company."

He had drawn near to her. His reeking breath and odious features brought an agonizing appeal from the girl as she turned toward Bruce.

It was a fatal moment for the ogling monster, for his stupidity prompted him to temporize with fate. He deliberately slipped his arm about her waist.

Then something happened.

Bruce swung the chair over his head, and the hardwood seat caught the burly sailor straight on the forehead. It was like the crack of a mallet, and was accompanied by an almost delirious groan as the big fellow sagged to the floor.

Instantly the Cracker Pot assumed all the dramatic realities that are supposed to

exist within the classical hall of Pandemonium. The full quota of demons and evil spirits were surely in evidence. At least twenty brawny men were ready to avenge the violence that had been shown their leader, and they swarmed to his rescue.

Prudence seldom loiters in the footsteps of folly, and Bailey's line of action, following Bruce's initiative, was never dictated by reason. He made straight for the oncoming horde of frenzied villains. As a tennis player he knew the value of a sweeping stroke, whether behind racket or fist, and his first blow had naught of the short arm play. It was a vicious staggering drive straight into the sodden face before him—the first one he could find. Had it missed, he would have lost his footing by the momentum of the stroke.

By instinct—for he had no time for observation—Bailey knew that Bruce was fighting like a demon. And he was. His splendid physique was behind the hammer-like blows he was railing upon his assailants. The best that Connors had taught him of feint and guard all came back. Like a bit of a half-forgotten poem, the lines returned.

Behind Bruce was a little alley that led to the rear of the platform, and here the young woman had taken refuge. This small passageway was free, except for a pile of chairs stacked against the wall.

Between Bruce and the side wall was one of the round serving tables. There was one near Bailey also. They were about to play an important part in their plan of defense, as neither Bruce nor Bailey were supermen. Courage alone was not sufficient to resist the forces against them. Beaten to his knees, Bailey had only saved himself by grasping the near-by table and struggling to his feet. The friendly alley was at his left, and he realized that only a strategical retreat would save the critical moment.

Gripping the table with his left hand, he managed to keep it in front of him as he began the task of consolidating the fighting line, his object being to gain the mutual advantage of fighting behind an improvised barricade.

Instantly Bruce saw the value of the

move, and overturned the table in front of him.

They now stood behind a barrier that offered no great amount of protection, unless they could keep the opposing forces away from them; and to the credit of the young woman, she solved the problem, temporarily at least.

"Here," she shouted, "catch it."

She tossed one of the chairs to Bruce, then another one to Bailey. But even this mode of defense was to avail for the moment only. Gradually they were being forced back to the platform; it seemed a miracle that they were not crushed by the very force of numbers.

A particularly insistent ruffian had forced his way between the tables and drove Bruce to the platform steps, but his very position made him a target for their combined efforts. Bottles, glasses, and, to Bruce's horror, an occasional shot began to whiz by. Then a chair loomed up in front of him, and one of the wooden legs caught him full in the forehead.

He knew that his fight was over. Blood trickled across his face and the room blackened before him. He staggered against the piano.

Perhaps it was his prominent position, as he stood above them, and the knowledge of victory, that caused a respite in the fighting. At any rate, there was a pause, in which the sound of splintering wood was heard.

It came from behind the platform, where the trapdoor had buckled as if it had been a piece of wet cardboard.

Bruce turned, and the strange thing he saw revived him as no medicinal restorative could have done. A monstrous black hand had shot up through the splintered center. It was accompanied by a growl that resembled the muttering thunders of a distant storm.

As he gazed in dismay the hinges broke from the floor and the woolly head of a giant negress appeared at the opening—a head that, to Bruce, resembled a huge black kettle.

Bruce gasped at her size as she emerged like one from the pit. In girth she suggested the size of an ale cask, while her

height was not less than six feet three inches. Clad in a loose calico wrapper, bound at the waist, her body was a mountain of billowy flesh.

Frightful as she was, Bruce's æsthetic sensibilities were to receive a still greater shock, for directly behind her crawled an enormous gorilla.

It was by no means an opportune moment for speculation, but in spite of his dazed mind Bruce wondered could this be any part of the mysterious cargo that Captain Jake had brought from South Africa? Surely they were indigenous to the soil.

Graver thoughts now began to assail him. Had this savage pair of African giants emerged to augment the hostile forces they were now contending with, or were they merely bent upon escape from confinement? He moved to the right of the platform to await the issue.

Together they climbed up through the opening, and now stood on the platform—their bodies swaying in unison, as if they would catch the harmony of the riotous *mêlée* before them.

The negress was muttering an unintelligible jargon—a gibbering of harsh consonants—and, to the surprise of Bruce, the big beast at her side seemed to understand. From his elevated position Bruce now comprehended why they had thus far been able to hold out against superior numbers. When their leader had fallen, at least a dozen of his band had dragged him to the rear of the hall, where they were administering copious drafts of the one form of restorative they were familiar with—brandy.

Under their splendid administration of alcoholic first aid he had regained his senses at the moment the negress mounted the platform. Then his eyes seemed to pop from their blood-stained sockets. He strained forward, and a gloating grin spread over his coarse features. His voice grew husky with anxiety as he shouted instructions for her capture.

Having in a measure regained possession of both mind and strength, Bruce glanced at the young woman, and was astonished to find that she was also regarding the negress with an expression of keen satisfaction. A peculiar relaxation of mind was reflected

in her face, as if some grave doubt or problem had been settled.

In response to their leader's urging two, more courageous than their companions, leaped forward to obey his commands. The negress waited their coming; her great hands were twitching convulsively, and she handled herself with a speed that was in marvelous contrast to her size.

With utter scorn for all things feminine, the confident sailors were about to scale the platform steps and gain their objective by the very fierceness of their assault. But their overconfidence proved their undoing. Their grinning faces gave way to terror.

The negress had stepped down to meet them. Her deft black hands had grasped their necks as easily as if they had been toy manikins, and their heads came together with a smash. Bruce likened it to the snapping of a Brazilian walnut as it surrenders in the jaws of a cracker.

The hideous brute at her side now commenced to indulge in his own peculiar form of jungle calisthenics. He was of the species known as the *Troglodytes Gorilla*, or great chimpanzee of East Africa, and like his kind, when aroused, had assumed an upright position and was beating his breast with his huge fists. It was like the vibrations of a great drum.

His clumsy antics were accompanied by a deep rumbling bark that swelled into a roar of rage. Even in his crouching position the animal was taller than the negress, and his great hairy chest loomed up like the form of an ox.

The supporting members of the brawny sailors who would capture the negress had stopped when they saw what manner of punishment had been meted to their comrades. There were three of them, but they had sadly underestimated the reach of those awful arms. With incredible swiftness the gorilla had shot his steel-like claws straight against the chest of the foremost man. To Bruce's astonished eyes it had been without effort, but the effect was horrible. There was a crackling that resembled the crushing of an eggshell as his body collapsed. Then the long, sinewy fingers touched a face, and, to Bruce's dismay, it was like a face that had disappeared.

The gorilla was now on the floor dancing with the grace of a drunken bull. One moment he would be on all fours; the next he would erect himself and sway with a ponderous grace that was almost hypnotic.

Bruce never knew whether it was due to a signal from the negress or the promptings of brute cunning, but upon one of the gorilla's downward swings he suddenly lurched forward and grasped one of the more adventurous ruffians by the ankle. It might have been purely imagination, but Bruce thought he traced the flicker of a bellish grin as the brute arose and the dull thud of the man's head was heard against the floor.

The inconceivable reach of that simian arm was then in evidence. In ever-widening circles the victim was being swung over his head until the frenzied beast finally let go.

Then, as if released from a catapult, the human battering-ram shot through the air, like some inanimate object, over the heads of the breathless spectators, a distance of some fifteen feet, where it dropped to the floor near the table at which the juggling sailor had been seated.

That he might the better direct his followers, he had climbed to the table top and was mouthing the most sulphuric curses he could command.

As the body of the sailor rolled against the legs of the table he unsheathed the long-bladed knife at his belt, and a second later it left his hand—a flash of light through the room—and plunged into the right shoulder of the gorilla.

The great brute did not seem to notice it. Not so, however, with the negress. Had the deadly blade been driven into her own black body she could not have uttered a more pitiful cry.

Quickly she withdrew the knife from the tangled knot of muscles in which it was embedded and with splendid aim sent it whirling back to the astonished sailor. It cut the air with a hiss, and the group surrounding the leader's table dodged right and left as it struck and quivered in the wall behind them.

Beyond any doubt, the critical moment

had arrived. The big negress had evidently surrendered—at least in spirit, for the moment—and if the hardy crew of villains intended to effect her capture they knew that their time had arrived.

The gorilla had introduced a new form of frolicking playfulness, if such it was. He had a peculiar trick of slapping his paws against the floor, and the negress saw it. Whatever train of African thought it aroused in her, one thing was certain—she lavished a glance of crude affection upon the great hairy brute and then faced the mob that was sweeping toward the platform.

Once more the spirit of battle waged within her, and what followed was in reality the supreme incident in a night of riot and blood.

A word from the negress—that was all—and the gorilla had leaped to the platform and was at her side. True, it might have been the herculean strength of the giantess alone that was responsible for the success of her plan, but the gorilla certainly gave of his clumsy strength; for between them they had tipped up the old-fashioned square piano and shoved it, or hurled it, straight into the crowd of sailors beneath them.

There was an awful moment of crash and curses; a period of indescribable confusion, during which the juggling sailor had secured another long-bladed knife from one of his companions. It twirled above his head for a moment, then left his hand a glint of murderous steel, and plunged to the hilt in the throat of the gorilla.

"This way, quick!" shouted a voice behind Bruce.

It was Joie the Jug, and his head and shoulders were protruding from the trap-door opening.

## CHAPTER VII.

### DOWN IN THE PIT.

**A**MID the surroundings the call was like an invitation to plunge into a cavity of hell—a message from Satan's own emissary—and the croaking tones in which it was uttered by Joie but emphasized this comparison.

Bruce realized that something must be done. Quick action was imperative. The mass of squirming humans underneath the piano were being pulled out like worms from a clod of earth. All that had gone before was peace to the din that now reigned. Bruce wondered that the horrible roar did not split the very walls of the room.

The power to act seemed to have left him. Like one completely dazed he waited for some impelling force that would drive him to action.

It came. There was a crash at the street door—a battering in of the panels, the breaking of glass, and finally the flash of a locust club followed by a bluecoated arm. Some one had turned in a riot call, and the police were tumbling through the door. It was the one thing that Connors had always dreaded.

Next to the shooting up of the Cracker Pot by the marauding sailors, it was the most to be feared. Bruce knew this, and faced the issue. How far did his responsibility to Connors go? Had he reached the limit? His mind began to assemble the scattered jackstraws of his game.

One grave danger, at least, was over. The sailors were no longer intent upon the capture of the negress. Their traditional enemy had put in an appearance, and they were being clubbed into submission.

Bruce stepped nearer to the excited Joie. "What is it?" he shouted.

"Come quick—all of you! I know the way out!" he answered.

Peering down into the opening, Bruce saw by the dim light of a lantern that some one was standing below Joie at the foot of the ladder.

It was Eddie Carbon, and his face had taken on the peculiar ashen hue that goes with a frightened negro. Bruce instantly grasped the situation. Just before the entrance of the sailors Carbon had passed through the dance hall on his way to the street, and had not returned. Therefore, to have reached the underground room, he must have done so by an outside passage.

Another revelation followed. This man Joie had known the place in the days before Connors made it respectable, and in

all probability was familiar with the dark and devious exits through which the gambling gentry effected their escape. It was reasonable to assume that he had made use of them.

Now came the question of giving up, or sticking; of seeing it through, or quitting. Bailey was equally quick to appreciate the importance of the decision. He moved nearer to Bruce.

"It's fifty-fifty," he shouted, "but I'll go you! Come on—it can't be any worse than this!"

The negress had given up moaning over the dead gorilla and was climbing down the ladder. Her grief was pathetic.

"I'm game," was Bruce's response, moving toward the opening.

Then he stopped. The young woman was crowding down ahead of him. In the excitement he had forgotten her. So far as personal violence was concerned, her danger was past, but there was no valid reason why she should subject herself to the uncertainties of what might follow unless she also knew that this was a road to safety. There was only one other sound excuse for permitting her apparent folly—she might have splendid reasons for wishing to avoid the police.

It took but a moment for these reflections to sweep through Bruce's mind, but even so—the opportunity to restrain her had passed.

She was at the foot of the ladder.

Bailey and Bruce quickly followed, and down they went—all of them—into the stone chamber which was supposed to harbor the valuable cargo which Captain Jake had sailed the seven seas to garner.

Bruce hurriedly took in his surroundings. The room was about fifteen by fifteen: a pile of straw in one corner; a heap of bones in another; a broken stool; some filthy blankets, and a queer-looking box that resembled a Chinese tea chest, except that it was smaller and considerably stronger. The lid was off, showing its use as a receptacle for food, as evidenced by a loaf of bread and several tins of canned goods.

There was no valued treasure here—neither sack, keg nor packet that might contain strange wares or merchandise; noth-

ing but filth and an atmosphere that was registering its moldy protest upon the surrounding walls.

What did it all mean? That was the question now uppermost in Bruce's mind. Was it possible that a giant negress and her horrible gorilla were the sole results of that Congo voyage? Was there some crude hoax behind it all?

Joie had pulled the door down over the opening and shot the bolts which locked it as best he could, into the broken sockets. Occasionally they heard the tread of a rough-shod foot on the floor above them, but it was quite evident that the fighting was over. Subdued voices came from the front of the building, where the police were probably lining up their prisoners.

Having appraised the dimensions of the room and taken in the meager details, Bruce was conscious of a sudden fear that had come upon him. Where was the opening through which they were to pass? Nothing but solid walls confronted them. He reached for Joie and roughly whirled him about so the light would strike his face.

"The way out?" he questioned. "Where is it?"

"Here," was the answer as he moved over to the corner and scraped away the straw, revealing a door similar to the one above them.

After lifting it Bruce took the lantern and lowered it into the black hole beneath him. His conclusion was that the cavern-like vault was a section of some abandoned sewer. In the distance he could hear the drip of water. This, and the curved brick sides, reeking with moisture, confirmed his opinion that their exit was to be *via* some ancient sewerage system.

Joie was at his elbow.

"Wait," he said. "Let me show you—I know the way. You stood by me this afternoon, and I want to make good. Honest—I'll get you out."

Bruce looked at Bailey.

"It's another fifty-fifty," he replied. "Try it."

The confidence shown by Joie as he slid down into the passage reassured Bruce.

Next," he called.

Eddie Carbon pushed the negress for-

ward, but Bailey, realizing that it might be difficult for her to make it without assistance, preceded her. It was well he did, as she could scarcely squeeze through.

Bruce, Eddie Carbon and the young woman were still in the square stone room, and, to Bruce's surprise, his companions were lingering behind. He turned to discover that they were searching among the rubbish in the opposite corner; pawing over a heap of refuse and bones. He could hear them whispering.

"What are you doing there?" he sharply questioned.

"Hunting for a candle end," replied the negro. "We may need it."

The answer was so ready, and the idea so sensible, that Bruce felt ashamed of the curt tones he had employed in addressing them.

A moment later they were all in the vaulted passage, Eddie Carbon being the last to slip through, Bruce meanwhile watching to be sure that he closed the door behind him.

The atmosphere was as heavy as lead. It was fetid and sour. Withal there was a gripping chill that penetrated to their very marrow. It was suggestive of the tomb, where every breath was laden with pestilence and death.

Beneath their feet there was a treacherous slime, and they found it difficult to retain their footing.

Bruce began heartily to question the wisdom of having relied upon the leadership of one so dull and sodden as Joie, but had some confidence in Carbon's ability to conduct them to safety. He also knew that if it was necessary they could at least return to the Cracker Pot by way of the stone chamber above them.

The grain of comfort conferred by this thought was destined never to bear fruitage, for an incident followed that brought Bruce face to face with the horrors of their position.

Carbon had pulled the door to position, but continued to fuss with the catch, or bolt

—Bruce did not know which.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Locking it," came the answer.

"What with?"

## CRAFTY ROGUES.

"A big padlock," answered the negro.  
 "Give me the key," commanded Bruce.  
 "Sure," responded the negro, jumping down from the short ladder.

Whether by intent or accident—he fell as his feet fouched the slimy ooze. His hand was outstretched to pass the key to Bruce, and there was no evidence of unwillingness on his part to surrender it, but almost before he landed there was an exclamation of fright from him. "My gosh—I done drop de key!"

His shrill-pitched tones echoed through the vaulted space, and far in the distance they heard the mocking repetition of "key," as if some jeering spirit had gloated over their danger.

For about ten seconds Bruce's heart action failed him. A clammy sweat broke across his forehead. To find anything in that mass of mud and mire would border on the miraculous.

"Bring de lantern, man, 'cause I got my hand right on de place where it done sink in!"

To Bruce's mind there was something mechanical about the negro's announcement—a ready-made resourcefulness that bordered on the theatric. Hence his first move was to examine the padlock, which he found to be securely fastened. He then flashed his light on the spot where the negro was stripping his fingers through the slime. In ever-widening circles his black hands were clawing the soft mass.

"Come on—come on—show y'self, Mistah Key. Jump into mah hands—come on," the negro crooned.

They all waited breathlessly for the result.

As Bruce watched Eddie Carbon, he also scrutinized every move and expression of Joie's. His face was nervously twitching, and he would gaze with uncertainty—first to the right, then to the left. Once more a thrill of terror swept through Bruce. For the moment he was panic-stricken. Suppose, by any chance, there were passages that intersected with the one they were in—would the lethargic brain of Joie succumb to complete bewilderment?

Between a negro of whom he was suspicious and a weakling who could not be de-

pended upon Bruce had no choice. Standing over Eddie Carbon, he was in a position to glance beyond him for a distance of several feet. What he saw gave him instant courage.

There were footprints, plainly defined; they had not been made by any one belonging to Bruce's party—he knew that. In fact, they were the tracks of one person, and they led away from the place they were now standing. The imprint was stale and there was no evidence that the individual had returned.

It was like a message from the occult. If Joie and Carbon had entered the Cracker Pot through this underground passage, he could trace the direction from which they came.

"No use—no use at all, boss. Mah luck done turned against me," said the negro, arising.

Without deigning to reply, Bruce took the lantern and advanced a short distance in the opposite direction—toward the river. Then he suppressed an exclamation of satisfaction.

The footprints of two men were plainly seen. Tracks led to the point where they had entered the passage from the stone chamber.

It seemed useless to waste further valuable time; Bruce turned to Joie.

"Which way?" he asked.

"To the left," answered Joie; taking the lead in what Bruce knew was the wrong direction.

Bailey, who had sensed the situation, now touched Bruce on the arm as a signal to draw aside.

"Do you think he will make it?" he asked.

"No—he has started wrong. I am allowing him to do so because I want to test the negro. The black rascal knows that the start is wrong, and I do not think he intends to correct him."

They had gone about fifteen feet when Joie halted.

"I'm wrong," he advised. "We should have gone the other way."

Bruce waited in vain for the negro to express an opinion—to confirm or deny Joie's statement. Two or three minutes

went by. All the negro did was stupidly to scratch his head. Not a word from him.

It was a gruesome wait. The insistent drip, drip of water in a near-by pool could be heard, and just behind him Bruce caught the sound of a swift-scurrying water rat. Instinctively he glanced at the young woman—she was the one member of the group who should have been alarmed over the situation unless she had confidence in the negro.

When Bruce finally spoke, his words jumped out with an almost metallic snap: "Listen, Carbon—I'll give you just one chance to come to life. Act, and act quick, because I am holding myself back right now."

"Keep your hands off me, man—put 'em in your pockets—'cause I'm goin' to find myself. Yes, sir—we gotta go back."

In single file they now moved toward the river, and had traveled about one hundred feet when Bruce discovered that the brick pavement under their feet was comparatively clean. The sediment had been deposited in the low places only—therefore his check on the negro was gone. Once more Bruce became apprehensive. What now?

Another fifteen feet and Eddie Carbon halted. Bruce hurried forward and saw that a pile of bricks partially blocked their way. At some time in the past a section of the roof had fallen.

To crawl over them involved no danger and would not be difficult for any of them, unless it was the negress. Nevertheless, Bruce decided to investigate first. If he found a bed of untracked mud on the other side of the obstruction it would signify that the negro had led them past the exit Bruce was so anxious to find. With this in mind, he rather welcomed the blocked passage, as he would use it as an excuse to proceed alone. It gave him a chance to take his bearings.

Upon second thought it seemed wise to request Bailey to accompany him, which he did.

"Stay where you are," he commanded the others. "We will be right back."

Scarcely twenty-five feet beyond the fallen bricks they found the friendly trail leading on through the soft mud.

"Fine!" exclaimed Bruce. "We are on our way—it is all right."

They had turned to retrace their steps when both realized that something was wrong among those left behind. Had it not been for the intervening pile of rubbish, their light might have revealed what was taking place. As it was, they heard the voice of the negro; then a quavering note of protest from Joie; after that the muffled sound of a blow.

"It's the negro," said Bailey as they made for the pile of bricks. "He's crooked, Bruce."

"We'll see when we get on the other side—just now I am thinking about the woman. Come on—we will be over in a minute."

They were scrambling through the opening between the top of the bricks and the roof, with Bruce in the lead. He was straining to catch the first glimpse of what had taken place.

In his hurry he stumbled. The next instant they were in total darkness. In falling Bruce had dropped his lantern, and the jar extinguished the light.

"Quick—a match," he called to Bailey. It seemed an eternity before Bailey answered. Bruce could hear him searching through his pockets. At last he spoke.

"Not a match—this is awful, Bruce—not a single blessed match!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN AGAIN, OUT AGAIN.

"KEEP your nerve," advised Bruce, "and try again."

A painful silence followed, a tense moment of horrible suspense. "No use," he finally whispered. "How about your own pockets—have you been through them?"

"Every one."

Both men fully appreciated the gravity of their situation. Not a sound reached them. The silence was almost unbearable, and worst of all was the thought that they had been deserted by those whom they had left behind, unless something worse had occurred.

They were engulfed not only in silence, but utter darkness. If they moved toward the river, they had no means of determining when they came to the opening which had admitted Joie and the negro. Then again, if they were able to feel along the roof and locate the entrance to the stone chamber it would serve no purpose, because it was locked.

"To remain inactive, just now, is to gamble with our reason," said Bruce. "Move up so you can grasp my arm—we will feel our way along until we come to the muddy part of the passage, and then determine on some line of action."

Once more they experienced the horrors of silence. Instinctively they were voicing their thoughts in hoarse whispers as mind and nerves battled for something tangible. Groping their way in the darkness, Bruce suddenly halted, and his grip on Bailey tightened.

"Don't move," was his hoarse command. "My foot is touching something—a body, I think."

Then he leaned down to investigate. "Give me your hand," he added a second later. "There—what do you make out of it?"

"You are right," said Bailey. "It is a man."

"In that case it would have to be either Joie or the negro. Heavens! If we only had a light."

"Never mind the light. I will tell you which one it is," replied Bailey.

"How?"

"If it is Joie, there will be a bandage on his head."

"Right," responded Bruce. "I put it there this afternoon following the bartender's brutal assault."

"It's Joie," announced Bailey. "The head is bandaged."

Then he gave an exclamation of delight.

"What is it?" asked Bruce.

Bailey failed to offer a prompt reply.

Bruce could hear him fumbling in the darkness. He was about to repeat his question when the most joyous sound he had ever heard greeted him. It was the scrape of a match against the side of a box.

"Thank the Lord!" was the reverent expression of both men.

"I found them in his vest pocket," said Bailey.

As the flame jumped from the burning match to the eager wick of the lantern, both men clasped hands. Then they hugged each other, even as two emotional women might have done.

At their feet lay the limp body of Joie.

"Stunned—that's all," said Bailey, bending over him.

"They evidently use him down here as a human punching bag," was Bruce comment. "See how considerate the negro has been to hit him on the same spot that the bartender used. Maybe it is part of their game to gamble on how far they can boost him into eternity without shoving him over the line."

Lifting the battered wreck of a man into a sitting position, they were gratified to see him slowly open his eyes.

"What happened?" asked Bailey.

"Eddie Carbon hit me," mumbled Joie.

"What for?" asked Bruce.

"I dunno," was the answer.

"Come," said Bailey; "we are wasting valuable time. Lend a hand, Bruce—we will get him on his feet. Perhaps they will serve us better than his brains."

With profound satisfaction they discovered that their patient could walk, although his progress was painfully slow.

"One thing puzzles me," said Bailey.

"I fail to understand how the negro made his escape in the dark."

"He was not in the dark," was Bruce's comment. "The last thing he did before leaving was to skirmish for a few candle ends, all of which proves that he was laying his plans to desert us."

"How about the woman—do you think she is working with the negro, or have circumstances conspired against her?"

"I wish I could tell you," was Bruce's reply. "To me she represents the biggest mystery we have so far encountered. When Eddie Carbon passed through the Cracker Pot to-night I scrutinized her face closely, and was positive that she had never seen him before. Later, when I caught them whispering, I changed my mind."

By this time they had reached the entrance to the stone chamber. The door was just above their heads.

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Bruce. "So help me Bob—it is open."

"Right," commented Bailey in low tones, "and unless I am mistaken here is the big padlock. This way with your light—it's in the mud. I just stepped on it."

"Not so loud. Take it easy," warned Bruce. "They may be waiting for us to poke our heads up through the opening."

"Never," replied Bailey. "They are not up in that room. The Jumbo negress could not make it. She travels in one piece. In sections she might have made it, but in one chunk—no. I tell you she busted her waist line coming down. Didn't I help her?"

"That as it may," said Bruce. "I'm going to find out. Stay where you are for a moment."

Thrusting his lantern ahead of him, Bruce cautiously climbed into the room they had so recently fled from. Bailey was right. Eddie Carbon and his companions had not made their escape in this direction. The bolts on the shattered trapdoor leading up into Connors's dance hall had not been touched.

"What do you find?" asked Bailey from below.

"Not a thing. The room is empty."

"Then it ought to make a nice little bedroom for this cripple. Can't we plant him on that pile of straw in the corner?"

"A good suggestion—boost him up."

Together they hoisted Joie into the room, after which Bailey climbed to Bruce's side. Both men were grappling with the same problem. What motive had influenced the negro? Why had he opened the door, after taking such pains to convince them that the key was lost? What was his purpose in risking all by stopping long enough to unlock a door he had no intention of using? Surely it was not because of kindly intent; just to allow Bruce and Bailey an avenue of escape.

"For a liar, that negro is the finished product," Bruce finally remarked. "Think of his acting. He may be a knave, but he

is no fool. Could anything have been more artful than the way he clawed in the mud for a key that was probably in his pocket all the time?"

Bailey, who had been giving close attention to the sordid details of the stone chamber, suddenly turned to Bruce.

"You can pin my medal right here," he said, tapping his chest.

"A medal for what?" asked Bruce.

"For being the star sleuth bound. I know why the negro opened this door."

"Why?" asked Bruce, all attention.

"To sneak up and get the funny little chest. It's gone."

Bailey's simple deduction required observation only to confirm it.

The strange-looking box had vanished.

During Bruce's earlier inspection of the room his attention had been cunningly diverted from the box by its apparent use as a receptacle for food. In all probability a shallow tray had been fitted into the top of the chest for the purpose of misleading any one who might become curious. The open lid had likewise served to disarm suspicion.

"Once more the interest quickens," said Bruce. "What do you imagine was in the blooming chest?"

"Don't ask me," replied Bailey. "I'm a sleuth—not a fortune teller. Furthermore, I think we should forget, for the moment at least, the chest and its contents, as a graver matter is up for decision."

"All right, chief—I'm listening."

"In the first place," began Bailey, "grim disaster has flirted with us ever since we set foot in the Cracker Pot. Everything we promised to look after has disappeared, or been wrecked right in front of our eyes. Connors—Eddie Carbon—the negress and the mysterious young woman—all have vanished. Besides that, the sailors have riddled the Cracker Pot and the police have closed it up for good. Now, what I want to know is this: shall we climb back into the dance hall and wash our hands of the entire mess, or slide into the sewer and hunt for the negro?"

The lines of Bruce's mouth tightened and a bit of the bulldog flashed from his eyes. He moved toward the opening.

"I'll take the sewer," he snapped.

After making Joie as comfortable as possible under the circumstances, they once more entered the evil-smelling passageway beneath them.

Upon this occasion there was one thing in their favor—they were sure of their direction. It was toward the west and away from the river.

They soon reached the point where Bruce had discovered the stale footprints of the person who had walked in the direction they were now pursuing. Here they found new tracks—the plain trail made by Eddie Carbon and his companions. Especially noticeable was the broad tread of the negress.

Following this plainly defined path, they traversed a distance equal to the length of a city block. Here it suddenly stopped. There was a jumbled mass of footprints, beyond which the soft mud was trackless. There was also a jagged hole in the bricks at the left side of the passage. Into this a door had been roughly fitted. It might have withstood the combined efforts of a dozen men when first placed there, but now it was crumbling with age. In fact, as Bruce touched it, a handful of rotting shreds crumbled to powder.

"After all, you can't help but admire the negro's cleverness," said Bruce.

"In what respect?" questioned Bailey.

"Why, he was moving in the right direction when I stopped him and insisted upon going the other way."

"By George, you are right! What do you make of it?"

"Simply this—there are two entrances to this passageway. Either one was at the command of the gambling fraternity at the time they were using the Cracker Pot for crooked games. One east toward the river, and this one west of their point of entry."

"I follow you. Somewhere beyond the pile of bricks we climbed over there is another way out."

"I think so. The negro had no special plans beyond locking the door behind him. He was ready to accept conditions as he found them and await his chance."

"Well—he got it," said Bailey.

"He certainly did," replied Bruce. "But chirk up; we are about to rope him."

"Why this burst of confidence?" asked Bailey.

"Because he cannot go very far with that colored dame he has with him. She isn't built for speed. Besides that, her last ounce of energy went into the fight she made. On your guard now, Bailey. My personal opinion is that they are not far away."

Bracing their shoulders against the door, the decayed timber split into fragments and the shattered sections dropped to their feet almost without a sound.

"That's good," said Bruce. "The less noise we make the better."

Then they stepped through the opening. They were in the cellar or subcellar of some abandoned warehouse. The flagstone pavement was grooved and rutted by the steel-hooped chimes of many an ancient cask, and the faint odor of leaf tobacco still lingered on the vitiated air.

A forestlike array of heavy wooden uprights first claimed their attention. Each post was circled by Bruce or his companion, after which all the dark corners were carefully explored.

"They are not down here; I am satisfied of that," said Bruce.

"So am I. What comes next?"

"The stairs," replied Bruce, indicating a dusty flight leading to the floor above.

Glancing upward, Bruce saw that there was no door to negotiate at the head of the steps. In all probability it had long since disappeared.

As they started to climb Bailey touched Bruce's arm. "Put out your light," he whispered.

Bruce saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and complied with the request.

"Easy now—listen!"

As both men strained to catch the slightest sound that would offer a clew to what they might encounter the scraping of a door was distinctly heard, as if some one had opened it with extreme caution. After mounting several more steps Bailey again placed his hand on Bruce's arm and repeated the cautionary "Listen!"

"I hear it," said Bruce, after a moment of silence. "What is it?"

"Deep breathing."

With soft tread they mounted the last two steps and once more paused to get their bearings.

The impenetrable darkness was all about them, and Bruce wondered if they had acted wisely in extinguishing their light.

"Get out your matches," he said.

In complying with the request Bailey moved, and a board under his feet creaked. It was by no means a gentle sort of creak, but loud and insistent.

Both men expected something to happen. Both instinctively crouched in the dark—but nothing occurred.

Standing thus, with every sense alert to interpret its vibratory signal, they again heard the deep respiration of a person in slumber.

"Scratch your match," said Bruce.

A sharp, quick stroke was heard as Bailey followed instructions; but no light. It had missed fire.

At the same time the rasping noise they had previously heard was repeated—the scraping sound of a door that was hard to open.

Both men turned, and knew that they were on the main floor of the old building, on a level with the street, for not over fifty feet away one of the big front doors had been pushed open from the outside, and a flood of light from a convenient street lamp disclosed the outlines of the person who had opened it.

It was the girl, or young woman, who was in sympathy with the negro's interests. After a hasty glance within she went back to the sidewalk. Anxiety was reflected in every move. To secure a better view down the narrow street she stepped from the curb. A moment later she returned to the door—and closed it.

"Waiting for the negro," was Bruce's low comment. "Now is your time to light the lantern—while the door is closed—then cover it with your coat."

Bailey had scarcely complied with instructions when the girl again opened the door. She was laboring under great excitement and apparently could not muster the courage to advance beyond the threshold.

As the light streamed in through the

open doorway both men sought to increase their knowledge of the conditions which surrounded them.

"Look," whispered Bailey, "to the right—near the post—the negress—asleep. She is all in."

"A-hah! The deep breathing," chuckled Bruce.

The girl had suddenly quieted down. There was a rumble of wheels coming from the direction in which she was gazing, and her attitude had changed to one of assurance. Framed in the doorway, her trim figure blocked against the glare of light, she stood like one who had gained the dignity of a new personality.

Not a line of her lithe form was lost to Bruce—the indefinable something that might be called bearing or poise; the fleeting suggestion of a haughty spirit; and, withal, that touch of feminine grace which defies analysis.

Bruce recoiled at the vividness with which these things were being etched upon his mind.

"She's a daughter of Belial," he finally muttered, dropping into the clerical vernacular for the first time.

"You said it," grunted Bailey.

For an instant Bruce was nettled at his friend's ready indorsement. Then the absurdity of his resentment annoyed him. His nerves had become frayed under the night's ordeal. It was a time for decisive action rather than idle fancies.

The rumble of wheels had now become louder—a definite pounding of steel tires on the pavement and the beating of hoofs.

Directly a carriage rolled into view before the open door, and from it stepped the negro. It was evidently his intention to load the big negress into it and get away quickly.

What must have been a discussion of route and destination then took place between the negro and the driver. There was a great deal of gesticulating and pointing in the direction opposite to that from which the carriage had come.

"Move down on the right," said Bruce, "and get behind that door. Close it the minute they enter and are free from its swing—then uncover your light."

## CRAFTY ROGUES.

With due caution Bailey crept forward. He avoided the broad, open space through the center of the warehouse by entering the shadows cast by a row of posts which were set at a distance of about ten feet from the side of the building. There was a line of these uprights on both sides. They flanked the open space.

Now, while it had been quite logical to expect that both the young woman and the negro would enter the building, it failed to occur in this fashion. The girl continued in conversation with the driver, and Carbon entered alone.

He had no light. In fact, he did not require one, as he knew where to find his charge, and it would be a simple matter to grope about in the semidarkness until he located her.

Bailey waited for the negro to advance well beyond the sweep of the closing door, then it closed with a crash. At the same time he withdrew his coat from the lantern.

Like a flash the negro wheeled, and his hand sought a convenient hip pocket. Whatever the weapon he was about to draw, Bruce took no chances. With a bound he was behind him. A fist shot through the air—there was a robust *click* as it caught Eddie Carbon behind the air—and the black man curled up and rolled away. It really looked as if the negro was about to demonstrate the law of perfect motion, which proclaims that a body once set in motion has a tendency to move on in a straight line forever.

Bruce had knocked him into the gloomy recesses behind the posts at the left of the room. His first inclination was to traverse the space between himself and Bailey so as to gain possession of the lantern, but caution made him stand by the negro who might require a second installment of fistic reasoning.

With this in mind he grasped the prostrate negro by the collar and drew him out into the light.

"Get up," he commanded.

The negro did not move. Either he had been knocked unconscious or was feigning. Bruce inclined to the latter opinion. His aching knuckles seconded the conclusion.

No granite paving block could have inflicted greater discomfort.

"Do it now," he continued, and by way of coaxing kicked Eddie Carbon in the shins—a kick that would eventually call for cooling ointments.

It was magic. A quiver of pain ran through the body. First he struggled to a sitting position, then with Bruce's assistance gained his feet.

"Up with your hands," was Bruce's next command.

With limp body and sagging head the negro lifted his arms, while Bruce hurriedly searched his pockets. They were empty. The ready movement toward his hip pocket had been for the purpose of intimidating Bailey.

The discovery softened Bruce. After all, there had been no real danger, and he was sorry to have punished the negro so severely. Besides that, he was showing symptoms of real distress from the blow, having grasped his head with both hands. He was also moaning, as if in pain.

Even as Bruce censured himself, the negro fell to the floor. It was a sprawling, headlong pitch into the shadows behind the left-hand row of posts.

"The light," Bruce called, moving toward Bailey to receive it.

It was the very move that the negro desired. His thick skull had scarcely felt the blow delivered by Bruce. He had dropped as a matter of convenience—to give himself time to think. His distress had been another bit of finished acting.

Not over six feet from his head was a door. It had been hidden from Bruce by the line of posts—the shadows—the distance at which Bailey stood with the light. Not until the bang of the closing door was heard did Bruce realize that the negro had escaped through it.

Like a shot he was after him—through the door, into a vacant lot, where the negro was just clearing a high board fence on the street side.

To the everlasting discredit of Bruce de Lisle, he used an expression that was—well, let's be charitable; it sure was expressive.

At various points within the inclosure Bruce saw the blurred outlines of trucks

and carts which had been stored there; rows of racks and stakes that lifted from the black shadows. To pick his way through this jungle of trucks would deprive him of the initial momentum that would be required to scale the fence. Eddie Carbon had taken it on the run; he knew the open spaces, and had made the high board structure with ease.

Hesitancy is credited with losing the most of life's prizes, and Bruce paused long enough to lose Eddie Carbon, so far as following him over the fence was concerned. But the end was not yet. There was the warehouse and the door that opened onto the street. With this in mind, Bruce darted back into the building.

"The door—open it quick," he shouted to Bailey.

It really seemed quite a simple thing to do, but after a frantic search for some familiar device to take hold of, Bailey—to his disgust—realized that there was none.

The presence of his clerical friend should have restrained the sizzling outburst which followed, but it did not. He popped a line of vocal punctuations which would fail to pass any editorial censorship unless expressed by a series of dashes.

"Th' blooming handle—where is it?" he finally spluttered.

"A nice question to ask me!" protested Bruce with fine sarcasm. "Find it! Good Heavens, Andy Bailey—you are muddling it."

In vain they sought for some catch or spring that would release the door, forgetting that it had been part of the gambling gentry's foresight to provide for just such an emergency.

To add to their mortification, they heard the carriage roll away from the door. For the second time since becoming involved in the Cracker Pot mystery they listened to the clank of galloping hoofs as they receded in the distance.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Bailey, holding the light far above his head and pointing to a slot about two inches long that had been cut into the door. It was about six feet from the floor, and the last place any one would think of looking.

"Much good it will do us now," growled

Bruce as he slid a pencil into the groove and threw back the spring catch.

It would have been hard to find two men more crestfallen than Bruce de Lisle and Andy Bailey as they stepped out to the sidewalk in front of the old warehouse. Bailey was nervously splintering a toothpick into fragments convenient for blowing from his mouth.

"What is the colored population of this country, anyway?" he asked.

"Several million," answered Bruce. "Why?"

"Oh, nothing in particular—except this: when they all commence making use of their brains as cleverly as Eddie Carbon can exercise his, hold your hat on with both hands; that's all!"

"Cheer up! We're out of the sewer," was Bruce's comment.

"But not out of the swirling mess of evil that eddies about the Cracker Pot."

"Hardly. We have been whirling about in circles ever since we made acquaintance with the place. Look—Connors's 'house of mirth' is down near the corner. We are but a short half block from its entrance."

Neither Bruce nor his friend realized that their disgruntled frame of mind was occasioned by the terrific jar which had been administered to their pride; and of all the inopportune moments for an additional blow, this was the one. It came in that form of mental alarm which is sometimes flashed in duplicate. Both men received the shock at the same moment. Both stupidly stared at the other. Bailey was the first to voice their mutual thought: "The big negress—what in the name of glory are we to do with her?"

For the time being Bruce lost that professional asset so highly prized by the clergy—his delivery. Blank amazement spread over his face, and in lieu of his ready vocabulary he turned to a form of expression that resembled the spluttering of a garden hose.

Then, as if to verify the universality of those laws which govern mental telepathy, the giant negress waddled through the warehouse door. At any rate, whatever the medium of thought transference, she evidently knew that some conference, closely

associated with her good and welfare, was about to take place, and she wished to be among those present.

Refreshed and rejuvenated by her nap, the saffron-hued lady was once more in evidence.

Of course she never knew it, but right then and there her subsequent career was indirectly influenced by the thing she did, although it was only what all women have done at all times and ever will. She talked. In quantity it was torrential—a combination of the whirlwind and the waterfall—but neither man understood a word she spoke.

A strange lingo gushed forth—one that was strong in "Ug's" and "Wog's."

"Some kind of African palaver," said Bruce, his mind reverting to Captain Jake and his Congo voyage.

"Spickle English?" asked Bailey. "You know—United States?"

Just why he should have considered it necessary frantically to wave his hands and murder his good Anglo-Saxon while asking so simple a question, no one but Bailey knew.

"Ug," was the polite response.

"Guess it must mean 'No,'" was Bailey's comment.

"Ask her if she knows Captain Jake," suggested Bruce, thereby deferring to Bailey's superior ability as a linguist.

"Wog," answered the negress, as if a repetition of the question was superficial.

"That's it," was Bailey's cheerful comment. "You see, 'Wog' means 'yes,' and 'Ug' is 'no,' in her talk."

"I am glad you get along so nicely with her," chuckled Bruce, "because you will have to chaperon the lady while I go for a truck or something."

"Who? Me? Not on your life!"

"Oh, very well—come on, then, if you think she's strong enough to walk."

"Hold on—wait a minute. You mean to say that we have got to walk the streets with this?"

"Certainly. What are we going to do—leave her on a pile of straw, the same as we did Joie?"

Again the negress showed evidence of comprehension—a quick appreciation of the

fact that Bailey was negative. She had grasped him by the arm with a clutch that would revolutionize the automobile industry if its registration could have been secured in metal units.

"Leggo—leggo!" exclaimed Bailey. "No holdum arm."

"There you are," remarked Bruce with due solemnity. "Isn't it beautiful—the way she trusts you? Why, man, you have a chance to make her your friend for life."

"Get the truck," groaned Bailey. "Get two trucks—anything!"

"I'll hire a carriage down at the ferry entrance, and will be back before you know it," said Bruce. "If Eddie Carbon considered that it was safe to load her into a four wheeler, we ought to be willing to take a chance."

"All right, Bruce, but for the love of mercy do me a favor—have a heart. You know—pep—speed—get back quick, will you?"

Even as Bailey finished he turned to the negress, and there was a note of imploring protest in his voice.

"Let go arm—see? Take hand off—understand? Let loosey. Then I give nice candy—smoke—tobac—anything."

Without waiting to learn the result of Bailey's efforts in the art of bribery, Bruce hurried toward the ferry. His way led past the Cracker Pot, and here he paused long enough to peer through the windows, but there was little to be seen, as the police had left the place in darkness.

It was all very gloomy and depressing. So much so that he began to question the sanity of his own and Bailey's allegiance to a lost cause.

The strain of the night was beginning to tell. He was weary, both in body and mind. His fighting spirit was on the wing. He was through. They would load the big negress into the carriage he was about to engage, and take her to the police station. It was time to call upon Captain Wallers for assistance.

Looking at his watch, he found that it was twelve thirty.

"An hour from now I'll be in bed," was his comment.

Right there conscience blew a whistle, or

rang a bell—at any rate, made some sort of a fuss.

"How about the poor chap you left on the straw—down in the Cracker Pot cellar?" shouted conscience. And the worst of it was that the clarion voice kept on repeating the question, "How about it? How about it?"

Some concession had to be made to so persistent a monitor, so Bruce stepped to the curb to secure a better view of the Cracker Pot frontage. No matter how weary he was, some effort at concentration had to be made.

Well, there was the main entrance to the Cracker Pot. Certainly, he knew all about that. Then there were two windows, one each side of this entrance. All right, there was nothing new about this, either. If he intended to gain entrance to the Cracker Pot for the purpose of releasing Joie, some starting point of greater value would have to be found.

How about the ladies' entrance, he asked himself?

He crossed the sidewalk and tried the door.

No use—it was locked.

Returning to his point of vantage at the curb, Bruce for the first time gave attention to the buildings which flanked the Cracker Pot: a ship's chandlery on the right; a rag shop on the left.

Hello—what was this? Three doors to the rag shop building! In the center, the regulation store entrance; to the right of that, toward the Cracker Pot, two more. One evidently led to the apartments above; one—well, that was strange—where the mischief *did* it lead?

As he looked a breath of wind stirred. There was a creak—a wee, significant creak. The door was swinging on its hinges. It was open!

This was interesting. Placing his hand against it, he found that without effort it swung back, disclosing a long tunnel-like hallway or alley. One glance within and Bruce understood.

There were tenements in the rear—a collection of ancient rookeries common to the older and more crowded districts of New

York. He saw that the alley had no connection with the rag shop, except as it offered a means of reaching the rear houses. And now conscience tendered its own reward. It came as the result of Bruce's fixed attention on the problem relative to Joie.

This alley—it might offer a solution to the vexed question, "How did Connors vanish from the Cracker Pot?"

Once more Bruce retired to the curb, and from this point considered the value of his discovery. There was no doubt but that the right-hand side of the alley was the retaining wall of the Cracker Pot.

To venture within would have been indiscreet, as he was without a light. Bailey's embarrassing situation also called for relief at the earliest possible moment. He would hurry to the ferry house, engage the carriage, place the negress in it, under Bailey's charge, and keep the whole outfit moving long enough to allow for a complete investigation of the promising alley. At the ferry entrance he hired a weary-looking old chariot drawn by a team of horses that showed signs of life only by the fact that they were still in harness. The owner and driver was one Larry Doyle—lifelong resident and hackman of Cherry Hill.

The ride to the warehouse was a short one, and as Bruce emerged from Doyle's veteran coach he saw that Bailey had evidently effected some sort of compromise with the negress, as her arm was linked through his with all the confidence of a June bride.

"Escort your friend to the carriage," said Bruce.

So far as Bailey was concerned, speech would have been like unto the rustling of dried leaves, or good wine wasted at the spigot. English for him had become a dead language.

The combined efforts of the three men were required to squeeze the lagging sections of the negress through the carriage door, after which Bailey climbed on the front seat by the side of Doyle.

"It's a shame we can't make two loads of this," was the latter's comment as he noted the strain on the traces.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



# The Pedestal of Command

By C. DONALD FEAKE

OUTSIDE, the slosh and steady run of an angering sea, an uneasy circle laboring beneath the sullen gray of heavy skies; within the fo'c'sle, an integral part of the stench and fetid darkness, slumped heavily across the sodden confines of a bunk, his eyes red, gritty, their pupils still obscure as to their functioning, a man.

"Shanghaied—" The word picked itself out sharply from the reeling jumble in his brain. He clung to it as something definite, something that he could focus upon. "Shanghaied—" He, Danny Whalen, chief mate of the crack clipper ship Flying Cloud, shanghaied, like any drunken dock rat, aboard some rotten old packet!

It was in the days when a respectable seaman couldn't even drop into Jerry Sullivan's "Chain Locker" for a nip and a ball without the formality of being tapped on the head and lowered into a waiting dory.

The hell of it was that the formality didn't end there; for the next "ruffle" or "flourish" or whatever the devil the navy men called it, was to take a beating from

the chief mate of the new rat trap—and they were rat traps and hell ships, too, for it was only rat traps and hell ships that found it necessary to resort to shanghaing.

Jerry Sullivan was considered a shanghaier of parts. A story made the rounds that he had once sent a dead Chinaman to a ship in the harbor and collected his fee of twenty-five dollars before the ship's officers found it was not a case of drunkenness. This was considered very unethical of Jerry.

Danny, gingerly feeling the lump on his head, heard the door being unlocked. Somehow he rose to his feet. Enough sense had returned to him to realize that it would do him no good to protest and threaten. In spite of his youth, he was something of a philosopher and a good deal of a fatalist. However, if there were any "ruffles and flourishes" coming to him he firmly decided he would give the chief mate the battle of his life.

The door slammed back and in strode the mate.

He was tall and bony. Deep-set, watery blue eyes blinked uncertainly from behind red, bushy eyebrows. A small mouth curved downward at the corners. The nose—a succession of lumps and ridges—resembled a deformed and overripe tomato. The chin protruded, bringing into prominence a red, sandy beard.

"So! Harbor gaskets on an A. B., eh?" He referred to the insignia on Danny's collar. "Come out on deck, bucko, and turn to—and get a wiggle on or I'll bust every bone in your neck."

Danny, without answering, left the fo'c's'le and began to secure the ship for heavy weather—coiling down lines and lashing the gear about the decks that might get adrift in the storm.

A cow-eyed Norwegian, slow in obeying an order of the mate, was promptly knocked galley west, and the curse: "You block-headed Scowegian, when I say 'chop-chop' I mean 'chop-chop'!" was thrown in for good measure. The Norwegian brought up against a huge block and lay there like a stunned ox, his shipmates eying him from a distance. One, a Breton, slid cautiously over to souse him with sea water. When the mate put his fist back in the pocket of his coat there were two senseless forms in the waterway.

Forward and aft the mate raged, finding fault, kicking the slow for being stupid and beating the quick for being "wise." He was cowing his crew by using the tactics his father had taught him: "To lick every man in the crew every day in the week." Only once had he failed in his slogan; a shanghaied prizefighter had beaten him unmercifully to a pulp. The pulp, however, had regained its solidity and the night of the beating the ship's log had spoken of one "James Watkins, A. B., lost overboard."

Danny recognized the mate as "Gallop-in' Dan Brannigan," the hardest mate on the Pacific Coast; hated, feared, a slave-driver of the old school. He had been knived, beaten, thrown overboard, and yet had always survived.

When his watch below came around, Danny found himself a bunk and sat there listening to the grumbling of the crew. Four of them were seamen, the rest, rabble from

the Barbary Coast; a tough, drunken lot of dock rats. The fo'c's'le—an evil-smelling hole in the deck—was dark and shadowy and smelled of oilskins and salt horse. An oil lamp that swung back and forth to the rolling of the ship cast grotesque shadows—painted additional evil on faces that were perfect. Two English cockneys had drawn off by themselves; their clay pipes glowed in the darkness—smoldered—darkened—with the steady puffing of resignation.

The inevitable sea lawyer had the floor and was saying: "And he cussed and clouted, beat and kicked until I got tired of it and so I went for him, and did you swabs help me? Pfthaa!—sailors? A bunch of yaller-bellied Chesapeake Bay oyster pirates!"

And so it went—but soon the voice sank low, blended unintelligibly with the heaves and creakings of the ship. The listening circle narrowed—drew in upon itself, leaned ever closer to the central figure, who whispered on and on and in whose voice there had crept a note that was sinister.

## II.

STEADILY the Riding Scud bore southwestward. Two weeks after sailing. Gallop-in' Dan Brannigan had not lessened his abuse, beating at the slightest provocation, sending them aloft with a curse and a kick, and double irons for those who resented.

Then one night the sea lawyer again held the floor in the fo'c's'le. It had been a day of bitter torment. He had slacked the wrong brace, and the mate had beaten and cursed until Captain Mason had interfered with the delicate warning that murder, unfortunately, he could not tolerate. Then he had sent the sea lawyer forward to bathe his injuries.

"... And I tell you right here," the voice half sobbed, "that I'll get square with him if it takes me all my life, I tell you I'll—"

The restless circle tightened—drew in again upon itself, again leaned closer to the central figure, who whispered on and on in muted harmony with the sullen noises of the ship.

It happened in a rush.

Danny had been giving the murmurings but the scantiest of attention. During the weeks he had numbed himself to his situation. It was only a question of time. Everything was only a question of time. Eventually they would make port—he would leave—perhaps exact a modicum of personal vengeance—perhaps just forget. Such things were understandable, fated patches in the quilt of a man's existence—

"Danny Whalen!" the voice reached out, sharp and distinct from the murk, from the fumbled hush of the whisperings. He turned a puzzled eye toward the sea lawyer, who said: "We need"—again the voice sank low—"a leader."

There was no mistaking the import of it.

"Danny Whalen," the voice rushed on with a hiss more sibilant than the waters surging past outside, "you had a mate's ticket. Why the hell don't you join us? You're the only one here that can navigate a ship. Ain't you got the guts?" The voice rushed faster. "You've stood aside and said nothing, and now, by God!"—the voice cracked sharply and pitched to a high, insane note—"you'll join us or we'll feed you to the fishes. Take it or leave it—your choice—here and now."

The faces of the circle were pivoted toward him—tense—strained with the look of fear mingled with the strengthening desperation. The murk gleamed—flashed strangely here and there with glints shot off from steel—there were knives, guns—

"Yes, Danny Whalen, we'll slit your throat if you don't, and if you squeal, may God have pity on your soul!"

They waited. The timbers creaked, groaned and sighed in their endless conflict with the restless sea. The lamp swayed on through calm, unworried arcs. The faces were still—motionless. Sometimes an eyelash flicked.

Danny slid a careless leg over the edge of the bunk and stretched lazily, as upright as the narrow confines would permit. When he spoke his voice sounded curiously weary—the baffled voice of intelligence trying to make itself comprehensible to the minds of children.

"Mutiny," he stated evenly, "is punishable by death." Then he added, as a sop,

a coating for the distasteful obviousness of the fact that he had just offered: "No voyage lasts forever."

The truth, however, was not obvious. Their grievances, the welling flood of their blind hatred, were. He sensed their utter impregnability to reason.

"Don't," he continued quietly, almost soothingly, "be a lot of old women. Stick it out. Look sense in the face. Do you think you can take the ship from her officers with a couple of guns—some knives—"

"Knives!" The sea lawyer's voice trembled to a shriek. "You think we're fools, Danny Whalen—we ain't—ain't! We've weapons—we've busted through the after-bulkhead and into the storeroom—there ain't nothing we don't need that ain't hidden in the chain locker. I planned everything. We're set—set, I tell you—all but the navigatin'."

"The bosun can do dead reckoning but for what we need, for the course we need to set—to," he leered knowingly, cunningly at the others, "to get to the place what we got to get to, we need more. We need you, Danny Whalen, and by the livin' God, we'll get you—alive, if you do our navigatin', and if you won't"—the words dropped with the precision of a steel hammer striking against iron—"we'll get you dead!"

Another patch was shaping in the quilt. Sense nodded to the overwhelming crush of numbers—numbers welded to a deadly power of unity by the searing fires of multiple and unconquerable hates. The circle, weaving through the shadowed murk, was increased by one.

### III.

THERE came a night when the Riding Scud, a pawn for the uncertain winds, fell off. The careless helmsman drowsed, a wretched, dreary figure at the wheel. The mate, standing at the taff-rail talking with the skipper in low tones, saw the vessel lose way. With a bound he snatched a belaying pin from the fife-rail and struck the drowsing helmsman a blow on the head. The man crumpled without a sound.

"Blundering fool—I'll teach you to doze at the wheel!" the mate bellowed, kicking the senseless form again and again.

"Bosun!" he roared. "Send that mob of fishermen on deck, or by the wench that gave you birth, I'll send you to hell with her! Chop-chop now, you carrion!"

Softly, quietly, his lips barely parting to permit the words to flow through, the sea lawyer, standing at the top of the ladder, spoke in a whisper to each man as he came up.

Danny realized that the moment had come. He looked at the mate, outlined ruggedly against the gray sky—at the slinking, muttering rats of men that drifted past him from the ladder head. His mind sickened, revolted at the patch that was being fitted in—there was something beyond the meaning of the moment that he had failed to grasp—something that had eluded him—that was eluding him still.

The surface urged that here was simply a case of rottenness fighting rottenness with the devil at hand as a judge between the two, and yet, in spite of all, everything in him, everything that had gone to the making of his training urged him to the other side—at whatever cost—at whatever sacrifice—to that other side where the mate stood, alone, impregnable, superb in his arrogance of power, of authority, standing four-square—no matter how dirty the feet—upon the pedestal of Command, that high ideal that must remain unshaken throughout the endless reaches of the sea.

It no longer eluded Danny—that was *it*, what he had been groping for, searching for in the darkness of his indecision. He was an officer—above all else—no matter what had happened to him, or what the Fates had hurled upon him, the idea stood out plain and straight. His place belonged back aft—with them.

He passed the mainmast; darted through to the starboard side and raced for the poop. The sea lawyer was there before him.

He heard the whining voice, curiously clear above the noises of the deck. "Mr. Mate, we don't like your habits or your langwidge or your tongue."

Gallopin' Dan Brannigan, his mouth agape at the monumental insolence, drew his fist back to strike.

From somewhere in the silent group of men in back of the sea lawyer came a single

shot. The fist sank weakly—Brannigan hesitated—mute—resisted to the last the sapping weakness that forced him to his knees—superbly kept his head upright; then, with the expenditure of his power, bowed slowly to the deck.

Danny saw the splendid collapse, a sickening lump clogged his throat, dumbly he tried to move forward—to take his place before them. His knees felt weak, his feet leaden, his mind refused to function, the rest was blurred—chaotic.

The second mate, a sickly youngster fresh from school, broke the spell of hypnotic stillness by jerking out his pistol and firing hysterically at the crowd.

The boatswain screamed as the bullet pierced his side.

That scream broke all hell loose. From a group of stunned, silent men they whirled into a wild, maniacal mass of animals—fighting, yelling, clawing. They reached the poop deck and fell upon the second mate and the skipper and bore them down.

The sea lawyer, his face livid with hate, was cursing, kicking and stabbing the body of his tormentor; his face had lost all semblance of human form; his mouth dripped foam; flecks of blood spattered his lips where his teeth had punctured the skin.

The vessel had swung about and was running free—her yards yawed back and forth in crazy abandon—the rigging whipped and strummed at the strain imposed upon them.

Fifteen minutes after the mate had struck the helmsman it was all over; his body had been cast into the sea, along with those of the skipper and the second mate. The sea lawyer gripped the situation at its flux—the uncertain moment when reaction sets strongly in and opens the gates of mob action to the bitter, coldly clear forces of reason—and of fear.

"What I say"—the men stopped short and listened—"from this here moment on goes!" And he pointed a meaning finger over the side. "Whalen!" he snapped. "Where are you?"

Then, as Danny stepped out from the darkness: "I want you to come with me. The rest of you go forward. Stand your accustomed watches as before. Keep her on

her old course. After Mr. Danny Whalen here gets busy then we'll shift her to the new."

The sea lawyer lead the way to the captain's cabin.

A deathlike apathy had seized upon Danny's mind. Dumbly he tried to excuse himself to himself—there had been so little time; in fact, no time at all, before the shambles. The peaked, sickly white face of the hysterical second mate wavered nervously before him. The stolid, splendid sinking to his knees of Brannigan sponged with a single gesture all the ugly markings from his slate, whereas he, Danny—the word gave him almost a pleasurable feeling from the very hurt of it—had been a skunk, to his ideal, to all that—

A solitary object, lying carelessly upon the leather settee of the captain's cabin sent a stunning shock ripping through his brain. He wondered in a lightning flash whether or not the sea lawyer had noticed it. With irritating precision and watchfulness he circled the room, and tossing his coat over the object, hid it from sight.

It was a woman's shawl.

#### IV.

THERE was nothing particularly remarkable about the shawl—a light, flimsy thing of wool—the remarkable thing was that it should have been there at all. No breath of a woman being aboard had been sensed in the forecabin. The fact implied a number of things. They curveted through Danny's mind during the trifling period of time it had taken him to cross over and conceal the amazing object beneath his coat.

If she had been the sort of woman who sometimes finds her way aboard for a passage or two before being flung back upon the streets she came from no such efforts would have been made on the part of the old man to conceal the fact of her presence on the ship. That no one aft had known of her led Danny to suspect that she wasn't one of that sort at all, that she was some one of importance, some relative of one of the officers, perhaps—the idea seemed the most likely of the lot—the captain's daughter.

On the other hand, there might be no woman at all. The shawl might simply have been there—somehow—anyhow—

And still—

The sea lawyer must not know. None of them must know, even suspect, until Danny had made sure. It struck him that the gods had in some sort of fashion offered him a way out, set miraculously a task before him, the accomplishing of which would efface the stain of his dishonor, might make him fit again in his own mind once more to mount the pedestal that symbolized to him command. He would protect her—fight for her, and if necessary, die for her.

Turning to the sea lawyer he said: "I'll put her on her course as soon as you give me the position you want to go to."

On a large table that stood near the door were the charts and the ship's log. On the chart Danny saw the vessel's position for the previous noon marked by a small dot and circled. Dividers, pencils, parallel rulers and erasers were scattered over the chart just as they had been left there by the skipper before—He shuddered the picture away. His eyes clung to a bookcase overhead. It held, besides the usual Bowditch, Azimuth Tables and nautical almanac, a treatise on ornithology and a novel of Gertrude Atherton.

"Here it is, Whalen, and remember"—the little pig eyes of the sea lawyer glittered balefully—"no monkey business and no questions!"

Plotting the position given him, Danny brought the point of his pencil to rest upon a dead-white chart. Four hundred miles to northward was a group of islands; another group spattered delicately an equal distance to the northwestward. The latitude and longitude given him, however, set square on an unnamed island, represented on the chart by a dot.

"The course," he said, "will be south-southwest until morning."

The sea lawyer nodded mutely. He stood before the glass, tapping it gently with a grimy finger. "Dropping," he muttered, "dropping hard—I'm going up to take a look. For the time being, Whalen, you'll stay in there when I don't want you on deck."

He hesitated a moment and then added: "I might's well tell you we're gonna sell the cargo for what we can git and then scuttle this left-handed bally-hoo. There's your room."

The sea lawyer indicated a door on the starboard side and mounted the ladder to the deck.

Danny, a slender feeling of exaltation creeping over him, opened the door of the room that was to be his.

From out of the gloom that shrouded the narrow confines of the cabin, he caught the slightest suggestion of a startled, quickly smothered intake of a person's breath.

## V.

"Por—he's gone?" The girl faced Danny, staring searchingly at him through a pair of hard, jade eyes.

"Skipper?"

She nodded.

"Yes, miss." Danny stared blindly overhead. "So," he added, "is the rest of them. The rest"—the words were dust—"of them that counts."

She looked at him curiously, speculatively. He wondered why she didn't cry. Daughters, he figured, when their fathers were dead, should cry.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. The statement sounded hollow—a mockery of the tumult inside him—worse than a wastage of words. He wanted her to kill him. Instead, she stated, in a perfectly even and controlled voice:

"Why?"

He told her—loosed the hideous mess of self-condemnation that had been festering within him. He felt immensely relieved, plunged at the end of his recital into a hesitant, stumbling avowal of the things he was going to do for her—to atone—to erase in some measure the stain; explained fumblingly to her precisely what, in his eyes, she stood for.

And at the end the jade in her eyes glinted into him, pricked their needle points into the clear blue of his own.

"You're goin' to keep me safe from the sea lawyer and the rest?" she said.

"Until I die." The utter simplicity of

its deliverance relieved the statement of its banality.

"You're a queer 'un."

"I suppose I am—queer. Things," he hastened on, "bother me."

"What things?"

"Queer things—like souls."

An uncertain light filtered in upon her.

"You'll keep me," she said, "even—from yourself?"

"From myself."

"You wouldn't want—me?"

"It ain't a question of that."

Se raised a speculative finger tip to the edge of her teeth.

"So!"

Danny wheeled. The word had slithered from some one standing behind him.

The sea lawyer stood framed in the open door.

## VI.

"By God!" the sea lawyer grinned amiably at the two of them. "A slut!"

Danny, his face dead-white, closed with a rush. After the first smashing blow the sea lawyer, his fists doubled into enormous hams and his head lowered, let out a roar of angry amazement and settled down to work. Danny met him. Shoulder to shoulder they dealt out man-killing punishment. With no attempts at parrying they battered.

Danny went to his knees, his face bruised and bleeding, his head swimming. The sea lawyer rushed in to finish with his feet what he had battered to his knees with his hands. Danny saw him charging toward him and he rose to his feet and clinched, fighting for his strength. He landed a mighty right hook flush on the jaw and the sea lawyer clung to him, crushing him around the middle. They broke—blood dripped from Danny's mouth, it ran down his chin, over his naked bruised chest and vanished into the tangle of rags that swung from his hips, the remains of his shirt.

The sea lawyer, swaying drunkenly, his lips drawn taut over tobacco-stained teeth, his black, hairy chest showing angry red welts, staggered and caught himself on the edge of the table, preparing for a rush that would end it all. Danny watched him through bleared, glazed eyes; unconsciously

he braced himself for the supreme struggle. The sea lawyer bellowed, spouted little drops of blood and saliva from his mouth. He half fell, half rushed the intervening distance and struck at the reeling figure that swam past him. Wildly—madly he struck, again and again—his arms slowed down. For a brief instant he saw a form stretched grotesquely into a heap of shuddering flesh.

Danny felt a soul-shaking blow, the earth swam in drunken circles—somehow—some one—gently lowered him to the deck—he could feel it with his hands, he struggled mightily with his arms and legs, they were dead, they wilted slowly, gently under him and through the haze that was closing his eyes, stealing away his senses he saw—

In the corner, apart from it all, stood the girl with the jade eyes. Infinitely nearer, swaying in circles, towered the sea lawyer. She crossed the cabin, nodded down at him and turned toward the sea lawyer.

"He's a queer 'un," she said.

And permitted herself to be enfolded in the eager grip of the sea lawyer's arms.

## VII.

THE moon, circled with a huge halo, was the first presage of the storm. The sky was blotched with rapidly drifting clouds. The ship ran into soft, easy, glassy swells; she bowed down deep to them, rolling and pitching restlessly, her ancient timbers groaning and creaking.

The moon came out at intervals. It showed glassy hard upon the rolling surface of the sea.

The wind behaved erratically, hauling back and forth, driving the exhausted seamen from brace to brace, increasing in intensity and dying back to a mere breath. The barometer faltered and fell, rose sluggishly, and dropped again—in the space of half an hour.

And Danny, beaten in body and soul, stumbled out upon the deck.

## VIII.

"It's up to you, Whalen—we—I—" The sea lawyer spread one hand in a helpless gesture.

"To hell with you and the ship—and her!"

"You'll die—with the rest of us, Whalen," the voice whined incessantly on through the singing of the strident wind.

"I know."

"You're a hell of an officer, Whalen!"

Danny stood on the poop in the lee of the cabin, his fingers grasping the rail tightly. He answered, through the swirling storm of water that blew past him—his eyes fixed on the slim, graceful spars that cut wide swaths against the gray, angry sky.

"I ain't an officer," he said, "but I'd like to pretend I am—once more."

"You means you never had a ticket?" the sea lawyer shouted at him. "You means you been stringing us all?"

"Not that. I have a ticket all right—"

"Then what t'ell—"

"It's something you wouldn't understand—no one would ever understand."

"Then save us, Whalen! You knows what to do."

Danny nodded quietly. "I'll save myself," he said. "I'll save that part of me that's cryin' out for help—and, maybe, if the imitation's good enough—maybe, when we're all down there—together—"

The dawning day had been ushered in by a roaring blast of wind that had whipped spare rope ends into tatters, had sent great, green seas tearing past, roaring in crazy abandon, their white tops torn into shreds.

The Riding Scud rose and fell with the seas. When she hesitated and struck, the water pounded her unmercifully. Sea after sea piled aboard her, filling the sea boots of the men, making their oilskin clothes a mockery. Her sails snapped and cracked with the fury of the storm.

The faces of the men ran rivulets of water. The bosun faced for a moment the full force of the wind; it whipped his beard until it looked like soaked rope yarn.

Danny eased her labor through the storm. He feared the sails would go. The sea was on his port bow. She was racing along a green slide one moment and bucking a monstrous, white-combed giant the next.

A huge wave rose directly under the lifeboat and smashed it to splinters, leaving only the blocks and falls hanging there.

It began raining. The wind lashed their faces with it, stung them and then blew it down their already soaked necks.

A great, gray sea lifted her bow up, and up, and then, with a rush, left her there suspended in mid-air. She dropped with a crash; the earth seemed to hesitate in its flight. It threw the sea lawyer flat on his face—then a crashing, swishing roar and a wave, more terrible than any before, smashed the door to the galley, washing the cook out on deck, raced aft and crushed the watch against the bulkhead, and subsided with a swash and a gurgle as it ran out through the scuppers. The watch fled below.

"To hell with the ship and with orders, too!" sobbed the sea lawyer, throwing his oilskins on the sodden, drunken deck. They crawled into their bunks and listened to the sea tumbling down above their heads.

Danny didn't care. Let them go. Let them sink like sick rats if they cared to. All he wanted was to ride the storm—to have his hand, his feet, where they should be when the last plunge came—to breast the anger of the heavens and the seas four-square on the pillar he was struggling to erect afresh.

The hard gust came as he had been expecting; it bent the masts with their scanty canvas. A boom told him something had carried away; a black, whirling shred whipped over his head and he knew it was a sail. A cracking smash and the foremast came down, splintering close to the deck, the tangled mass of rigging creating a maze of rope, wire, and splintered wood.

She listed to starboard—a hurried, fevered murmur and the men below staggered out on deck. The last agony of desperation seized them—maddened, crazed, they hacked at the wreckage that strewn the decks—reacting frantically to each command that somehow reached them from the solitary figure on the poop—the quiet, triumphant voice that pierced the medley of the winds and storm.

Wave after wave came aboard. The raging, blind darkness howled and sang a high soprano through the remaining rigging.

The horizon had advanced to within an arm's length of the ship. The main tops'

carried away, snapping the lines that held it like so much twine.

"She comes!" The cry, almost of exultation, hurtled from the poop.

A big, foaming sea came charging like a maddened giant—it towered up and up—up above the men who scrambled for safety—up like a wall of green glass, hung for a bare instant—and dropped. Like a broken thing the Riding Scud stopped and wavered; she gave a sickening lurch and rolled over to leeward, dipping her gunwales.

Half naked and staring wildly the men clutched any manner of support and clung there, their feet kicking and sliding on the slanting, slippery decks. Doors flew open; all manner of gear belonging to seamen came tumbling out upon the sea. They dug their fingers into each other in a mad attempt to hold on to the only thing that promised them life; others dug wildly at the deck for support.

"Cut! Cut!" their voices yelled hysterically. "God in heaven—the mast—cut it! She's coming back! She'll come—"

And just as the vessel struggled back, like some tired thing, a sea that blanketed out the very sky itself whirled smashing down upon them.

## IX.

THE wind died slowly, as if reluctantly and thwarted of its purpose. At sunset the sun broke through in a golden glance that bathed the mastless derelict that floated on the bosom of the ocean with a coat of gold. The sea, weary of strife, passed into a long, rolling swell that rocked the half-sunken craft to and fro.

The girl with jade eyes stood staring at the figure wedged upon the poop, stared at the pale, bronzed skin. She leaned over and drew the lids until they hid the fixed, blue pupils of the eyes. She looked quizzically at the smile resting so lightly upon lips that were at peace.

She turned her gaze and let it dwell upon the cruiser bearing down upon her from the west.

"He was a queer 'un," she mumbled stupidly, and with deft fingers, set about the rearranging of her dress for her entrance into the approaching world of different men.



# The Dance of Death

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The First Law," "The Third Act," "The Diamond Necklace," etc.

## CHAPTER XII—(Continued).

### PULSATING LOVE LETTERS.

"I'LL read them aloud," answered Fielding, grinning.

He opened the first letter, and cleared his throat to read. Garry paced nervously across the room and back; he fumbled for his cigarette case—found a cigarette and lighted it.

"Well?" he cried impatiently, tossing the match away.

"It begins just with his name," said Fielding. "Guy:

"I am furious with you. Ordinarily I would not write to you at all, but I am casting all discretion to the winds to-night. I am really very angry with you. You pretend to be in love with me, but you don't behave as if you are. You go on flirting outrageously with

half the women in town, and probably say the same pretty things to them that you say to me—and I won't have it! It makes me too disgustingly cheap. You *must* stop it or stop making love to me! That's flat! I will not share you with any one. Do you hear? It's bad enough to care about you at all. I wouldn't if I could help it, because I really don't like you or *admire* you or *respect* you, but you have somehow managed to make me care—I don't know how! I am in the grip of this tremendous infatuation that is making me act like a little fool—and I know it—and you know it! But you don't know this—that there is as much hate mixed up in it as there is love—and I'm a very uncertain quantity. I don't even understand myself, so you can't possibly understand me. And what I want to do now is to warn you! You are playing with dynamite, young man, when you play with me. You can't treat me lightly. I'm not at all the sort of girl that you have known before. The same tricks won't work. And there is a force working in

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me. So don't try to make me jealous! And don't think you can make me one of a string of silly girls who flutter about you and gurgle with delight whenever you deign to give them your attention. I will be everything or nothing. You must make up your mind to that and decide which. When you have decided, let me know. And then I will decide what to do about you. Until to-night!

"KATHERINE."

Garry dropped upon the edge of the big sleeping couch, looking quite gray and haggard. He was trembling.

"Some letter," mused Fielding, putting it back into its envelope.

"An honest letter," said Garry, "from a girl who plays fair and tries hard to look facts in the face!"

"And the main fact is—she's mad about him," added Fielding.

"Infatuated," said Garry.

"What difference what you call it? She certainly tells him to watch his step with the others or he'll have to answer to her! And that looks like evidence to me!"

"Read the rest of them," said Garry.

Fielding opened the second one.

"This hasn't any beginning at all," he said. "It just starts off—

"It's all very well for people to scoff at the long arm of coincidence in fiction and plays, but strange things do happen like that! Last night at two o'clock I was coming home from the Rainesford's dance and I saw Louise getting into a taxi in front of your door! Wasn't that odd—that out of all the millions of people in this town it was just I that chanced to be passing at that moment and saw her? Poor Guy! All your time wasted! All your elaborate camouflage in vain! All your cheating and lying and trickery discovered! But never mind! Perhaps it is as great a relief to you to have this trying affair ended as it is to me! God, I am happy to feel free of you at last! I have hated your hold on me—your attraction for me! I am glad it is over! Because I have always despised you in my heart and loathed myself for caring! And still, I did care! But not now! I see you at last—the shallow, deceitful, vile little beast that you are—and it's finished!"

"K."

"Was that the last letter?" asked Garry hopefully.

"No," answered Fielding, comparing the postmarks. "There were two after that!"

"Well, let's have them! Get it over, for pity's sake!" cried Garry. Fielding read:

"DEAR BEAST:

"You are right! You are not worth caring for and I would stop caring, gladly, if I could! I have tried! I have looked at myself in the glass and told myself just how worthless you are! I have walked the floor scorning myself and reviling you—dragging out all your petty, cheap little weaknesses and faults and failings! But it is all so useless. I still count that day lost on which I do not feel your arms around me. It is hideous—revolting to me—this slavery to the feeling you arouse in me. But I cannot seem to break the spell. I have moments of wishing that I were dead and out of it all—or that you were! How gladly I would weep over your lifeless form. Even the agony of learning to do without you would be so welcome—sweet grief! For I hate loving you! I hate it! You arouse things in me that I detest. Why has no one ever killed you? I cannot imagine! So many must have wanted to! I have lain in the dark, wide-eyed, and pictured myself doing it. It would be so glorious to be free. If ever a man came out of hell, surely you did. And I know that if I yield to you, you will drag me back there with you. But still—I temporize—and drift, every day nearer destruction. It is only early afternoon—and already I am longing for to-night! We will dance and forget—to-night!"

"Yours,

"K."

"What letters to write to him! What can he have thought of them?" wondered Garry.

"They evidently pleased him, for he kept them," answered Fielding. "He must have been proud of them—and of his power over her. What man would not be? A girl like that! Even if his influence was an evil one—and she knew it and hated it—just to realize that you could overwhelm her judgment—her intellect—her will-power! That must have been the crowning achievement of his life!"

"Poor Katherine," whispered Garry through dry lips; "poor tortured kid!"

Fielding unfolded the last letter.

He began:

"DEAR BEAST:

"You frightened me last night! You must not try to hurry me. I am thinking—hard! I am always thinking what to do about you—night and day! And yet, I seem to know deep

down inside myself that you must win me in the end. Because I have never denied myself anything I have ever wanted, and I have never wanted anything as much as I want you! I know, too, that only suffering and misery can come of it! I know you won't be faithful! I know it isn't in you to be true! You will make me wretched—probably beat me—surely break my heart! And yet I can't bring myself to give you up! My only hope is that circumstances will intervene and save me—some outside influence come in and take the whole decision out of my hands! I pray every night that I may not surrender! But I make no other effort to resist you. I suppose the world would think this weak of me. But so few women feel as much as I feel, or suffer as much as I suffer. This infatuation for you is a kind of madness burning in my blood. I can no more resist it or quench it than one can resist or quench fever. And I will succumb to it in the end, inevitably, as one succumbs to fever—unless I am saved. I have moments, too, of planning to run away. Once, I had my bags packed. And once I went to tea with you with my brother's revolver—loaded—in the pocket of my coat. But you were so sweet—so deferential—so humble—and yet so compelling—so masterly—I could not do what I had foolishly planned to do. But you must not hurry me. The moment for my decision will come and I will choose. Meanwhile—for me, this hell of indecision, of vacillation, of doubt and fear and dread; for you, patience. The trap is set! Your prey is snared. Soon you will be devouring me. Wait tranquilly!

"K."

"You see," cried Fielding, staring at Garry with burning eyes. "She killed him! It's as plain as it can be!"

"Impossible!" cried Garry.

"But she as much as says it! She admits she had thought of it! She had even gone with a loaded pistol! These letters are conclusive proof! No jury in the world could listen to them and still retain any doubt!"

"No jury must ever know they exist!" cried Garry.

"I'm afraid you can't prevent that," said Fielding.

The eyes of the two men met; then Garry rose and advanced upon Fielding.

"Give them to me," he said in a low voice.

"No—no funny business, now!"

"Give them to me!" he repeated more menacingly.

"I won't, I tell you! Justice has got to be done! Joan has got to be cleared. I warn you—"

But what his warning was, Garry never knew, for before Fielding finished speaking, Garry was upon him. Vigorously, with more strength than you would have thought he possessed, Fielding resisted. Struggling, pommeling each other viciously, they clinched, fell, and rolled over and over upon the floor.

At the first onslaught Fielding had thrust the letters behind him—and then had dropped them as Garry's clutch tightened upon his wrist; and there the letters lay, scattered upon the thick rug as they fought. And they fought like demons, each man thirsting for the other's blood—each man for the woman he loved.

But Garry was stronger. Gradually Fielding's resistance grew less; and suddenly, under the force of Garry's repeated blows, he collapsed, and lay in a heap on the floor—pale—motionless—scarcely breathing.

Garry wasted no time upon him. On his hands and knees he bent to gather up the letters—those damning letters in Katherine's own writing against which no counter testimony or legal advisers could defend her. Here, he knew, was her life in his hands.

He had got them all and was preparing to tear them across when he felt a sharp stab in his leg.

Turning, he found Fielding over him with a hypodermic in his hand and an expression of cunning on his face. He had tried trickery when he felt his strength failing, and realized that in a fistic encounter Garry must win. He had only pretended to collapse. And he had seized the opportunity—when Garry's back was turned—to bring out his hypodermic needle and shoot an injection into Garry Carpenter's leg.

Struggling against the powerful effect of the drug, Garry tried to rise, with the letters still clutched in his hands; but now Fielding was more than a match for him. He kicked out viciously, sending Garry sprawling. And as he lost consciousness his one agonized thought was that Kath-

erine would be left—defenseless—with Silvers and Fielding and the letters against her.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BARTLETT AND THE DARK ANGEL.

AS Garry lost consciousness, Moffat Fielding drew a long breath of relief. Then—with a swift, stealthy look about—he filled the hypodermic again, inserted it in his own arm with trembling fingers, and shot the piston home. The drug which had acted so swiftly as a narcotic upon Garry, merely quieted and stimulated Fielding. Irritable, nervous, almost irresponsible without it, he became—almost in the twinkling of an eye—calm and cool.

He picked up the letters and thrust them carefully into his outer pocket. Then he glanced down at Garry uneasily.

He did not know how long the drug would keep him inactive, as its effect differs considerably upon different systems; and he was most anxious to detain him in Da Costa's apartment for some little time to come. Accordingly he confiscated the heavy tasseled ropes that held back the damask hangings in the drawing-room, and with these bound the unconscious man's ankles and wrists securely. Thus making assurance doubly sure, he switched off the main lights, leaving only the dim lamps burning, and let himself out.

Nobody questioned him as he went down in the lift, and passed out through the gorgeous foyer into the night again. None of the attendants in the hall even looked inquisitive or interested. They were accustomed to comings and goings from Da Costa's apartment at all hours of the day or night. And as he was one of the building's most promptly paying tenants, they had been carefully instructed not to annoy him in any way.

The big doors swung closed behind Fielding, and he hailed a taxi with wildly beating heart.

"The King of Clubs," he called through dry lips to the chauffeur.

But as the cab sped along he chuckled hoarsely to himself.

He was enjoying the adventure for its own sake as well as rejoicing in his triumph over Garry for Joan. He had a mind fashioned for plots and conspiracies. In a different environment, under different influences, he might have been a great statesman or a daring criminal. But he was only Moffat Fielding—an idler—a nonentity.

He had moments of realizing his lost opportunities and squandered talents, however, and it was this, perhaps, that drew him to Joan. She was a might-have-been, too. They had that bond in common—the consciousness of each other's potentialities. Certainly she had been kinder to him—more understanding—than any other woman he had ever known—kinder and more understanding even than his mother. His mother had expected such great things of him—had dreamed such big dreams! She had never been able to reconcile herself to him as he was. But Joan knew so much more about life. She had lived out in the open, fighting for survival with any weapons that came to hand. How could any sheltered woman know the things Joan knew.

Fielding admired Joan because she had succeeded. She had conquered poverty. She had triumphed over disease and want and care. She had even defeated men. Fielding never thought of all that she had lost in her battle with life! He thought only of what she had won—ease, comfort, luxury. And she had faced her fight alone.

He felt that he needed her now, desperately, and that nothing he could do to insure her freedom would be too much. They were two of life's derelicts—clinging together. And he felt that his was the strength that was buoying them up. It gave him an ecstatic feeling of strength and manhood—this thought.

As the cab pulled up before Silvers's newest and latest club, Fielding paid the tariff and dismissed it. Around the corner he found the little door again from which he had emerged with Garry, and entering, he mounted the iron steps, two at a time. He knocked softly upon the door at the top—the door hidden behind the swinging mirror—and Charlie admitted him.

"Alone?" he asked curiously.

"Yes. Where's Silvers?" asked Fielding, noncommittally.

"Talking to a friend of his inside. I'll tell him you're here."

"I'll wait upstairs," agreed Fielding.

And he ran up to the little French drawing-room, and strode up and down the landing there, impatiently as he waited, for the door was locked.

Silvers, in the absence of the other two men, had observed a decided unwillingness in himself to remain alone in the room with the stiffening corpse. He bethought himself of his old friend Bartlett alone at his table in the supper room, and decided to go down and chat with him to pass the time. Leaving Charlie to watch for the return of Garry and Fielding, with instructions to summon him again when he was wanted, he crossed the room to Bartlett's table. Bartlett looked up as he approached, and mustered what strength he had left to smile a greeting.

"Hello! You look kind of pale! Anything wrong?" asked Silvers, observing at once—in spite of his own preoccupation—the other man's ashen face.

"Oh, no. Just a little tired, that's all," answered Bartlett. "It's pretty close in here!"

"Anything I can get you?" asked Silvers solicitously.

"No, thanks," answered Bartlett, "nothing!"

He moved the napkin cautiously, making sure that the telltale blood stain was well hidden. In spite of his long friendship with Silvers, he did not know how far Silvers was to be trusted. He had found it a pretty good policy, in his later years, not to trust any one. And he preferred to go on playing a lone hand now—as long as he could.

Silvers sensed his unwillingness to continue the subject of his physical condition, and tactfully dropped it, turning to the waiter to order sharply:

"Here! More champagne!"

Bartlett chewed upon his cigar and waited. He was wondering what had brought Silvers back—wondering if the police had come—if any one was suspected of the

crime. A dozen questions framed themselves in his mind and were suppressed.

"It's very interesting here," was what he actually said. "They laugh and dance and chatter as though there weren't a care in the world!"

His eyes—half closed—were fixed upon Silvers's face with well-disguised keenness.

"Yes, they laugh and dance," answered Silvers, leaning forward grimly, "while a man lies dead upstairs!"

"Dead?" repeated Bartlett.

"Murdered!"

They were gazing straight at each other now, Bartlett warily, Silvers interested to observe the effect of his dramatic announcement.

"What's that you say?" asked Bartlett slowly. He was aware of the quickened beating of his heart—and he wondered if the blood was coming faster.

"My dancer—Da Costa—has been killed," whispered Silvers cautiously. "I haven't let them know, of course! Don't want a panic. Haven't even called in the police yet."

"Ah!" breathed Bartlett, in relief. It was impossible to hold back the exclamation.

"Eh?" asked Silvers.

"Isn't it dangerous to delay?" asked Bartlett. "Won't you have to answer to them for it?"

"I've got some pull," said Silvers; "besides, I've got a kind of private detective working on the case quietly. We are hoping to get the goods on the murderer before dawn. You see, whoever did it is in this house still. The doors have been locked since midnight!"

"Have you any clues?" asked Bartlett.

The waiter poured the champagne; Bartlett wet his lips with it.

"No, that's the worst of it. No regular clues like you usually get in murder cases. But we got a couple of girls under suspicion."

"Girls?" repeated Bartlett.

"Yes. We think a woman did it! He was the kind of a guy to be mixed up with women, you know. What's that the French say?"

"*Cherchez la femme*," quoted Bartlett.

And he smiled. It was a smile of triumph—and yet an ironic smile, too. "*Cherchez la femme!*"

"Means 'find the woman,' don't it?" grunted Silvers.

"It does," admitted Bartlett. "So that's it, eh? You're investigating these girls?"

"After 'em hot-footed," Silvers assured him. "If you're interested, you can come up and look the ground over, if you like. He's still up there—just as we found him. Maybe you might get an idea about solving this mystery that we've missed."

"No," said Bartlett slowly. "No, I don't think I'm interested! *Not interested!* Besides, the fewer you take up there the better if you want to avoid arousing suspicion. These jiggers of yours would soon take fright if they got an idea what was up! I guess you'll handle the affair all right by yourself, Nat!"

"Well, I'm going to do my damndest," Silvers assured him. "What a stroke of luck! Can you beat it? My first night here! And this thing happening! If it gets a lot of notoriety it'll ruin me—and I'd hate to tell you how deep I'm in here! I got to turn over the murderer and hush the whole thing up if I can. I got to!"

Bartlett nodded. He hadn't thought about Silvers when he plunged the knife into Da Costa's throat and squared that score. He was sorry for Silvers now. But he told himself consolingly that Silvers was the kind of man who always lands on his feet! Besides, he was beginning to feel very tired and weak. He saw the room, now, only vaguely—as though through a mist. And he took a fresh grip on himself, setting his teeth, and warning himself that if he let go and fainted, they'd find the wound and—maybe guess.

Charlie approached and tapped Silvers on the shoulder.

"Fielding's back! He's waiting for you upstairs," he said.

"Right!" cried Silvers eagerly, and rose. "Now we'll see," he called back to Bartlett, as he disappeared. Charlie followed him. Bartlett held on tight until both men had moved away, then he fell forward with a crash across the table, but the wild, bar-

baric beat of the jazz band smothered the sound of his fall. He had not strength enough to raise himself. His mind was growing hazy. The music and the laughter blended confusingly in his ears. He closed his eyes wearily. The lights hurt them so.

And his last conscious thought was—whether they had evidence enough against one of those girls to send her to the chair. If he died without confessing—*there would be no one else who knew the truth.* That, he reflected, was pretty awful.

But somehow he didn't seem to care. *Nothing* seemed to matter.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE ABYSS INVISIBLE.

AT Katherine's table, Jack Kendall became very drunk. He seldom took much liquor because he was a very steady-going young man, who declared that it was folly to drink one's self into a state of unconsciousness or imbecility. Ordinarily one drink or two—for the sake of conviviality—sufficed him. But to-night he was upset by his interview with Katherine and her outrageous behavior. He sensed a new, wild, lawlessness about her that he did not comprehend—and it worried him. To offset his depression, he filled his glass again and again. Once Muriel Coleman laid her hand warningly on his arm as he was about to raise his glass to his lips, and gazed somewhat reproachfully and very wistfully into his eyes. It hurt her that he should have chosen just this occasion to take too much, because her father was of the party, and she valued the older man's good opinion of Jack. But having had more than was good for him by that time, Jack resented her interference, and with a scowl, drank it off.

"I know what I'm about," he said.

"Please don't bother about me, Muriel!" After that she said no more. But she watched him anxiously as he grew more and more morose.

There are some men who grow happier the more they drink. There are others who grow uglier. And Jack was of this second sort. He began to brood over Katherine's

## THE DANCE OF DEATH.

independence, her devilish recklessness. He began to watch for Da Costa, and when the dancer did not come back, thought his absence suspicious and wondered what was afoot, guessing that in some way Katherine was responsible. It did not occur to him, of course, that Da Costa was dead! He simply missed him—and watched Katherine, fearing lest she meant to slip away, too, to join her lover and perhaps put her threat into execution—perhaps elope. He knew that he was powerless to stop her if that was indeed her intention; but he meant to do his utmost. Meanwhile, as she passed from one man to the next, his eyes followed her restlessly.

He missed Garry Carpenter and wondered what had become of him—whether he, too, was involved in Da Costa's disappearance. That there was something up, he felt certain. He felt it in the air.

"Where's Garry?" he asked finally, when Katherine came back to the table at the end of her third dance with Rob Stewart.

"I don't know. Tête-à-têteing somewhere, no doubt, with that brazen little flapper in pink," she answered lightly.

"I haven't seen him in a long time. Funny, since he came with us."

"Rude, I call it," said Muriel.

"Do you think he can have gone?" asked Jack.

"Gone? Gone home, you mean?" cried Katherine. "But he couldn't have, you know. No one can—until daybreak!"

"I can," answered Jack Kendall grimly, "whenever I take the notion. You don't think *anybody* can keep *me* here against my will, do you?"

"But it was understood when we came. *Nobody* is to leave before dawn," said Katherine.

"Rot!" cried Jack. "I'll go if I like—and I've a good mind to go now! What do you say, sir? Got enough of all this?" he added, turning to old Mr. Coleman.

"I have," responded the old man. "Not that I want to hurry you young people. But whenever you're ready, I'm ready!"

He smiled around at them. Katherine began to tremble. Her heart was beating wildly.

"What do you say, Muriel? Shall we go?" asked Jack.

"You can go if you like," said Katherine calmly, "but I said I'd stay until dawn, and I will stay until dawn! That's that!"

"Come—don't be childish," said Muriel, and in a lower tone, added: "Jack's had much too much to drink. We ought to get him home and to bed if we can!"

"I shall not go until the doors are opened at dawn," repeated Katherine.

She knew she *could not* go, even if she wished. She knew Silvers would never permit her to leave. But the others, guessing nothing of this, looked upon her determination as willfulness.

"Not even for my sake?" asked old Mr. Coleman. "I am not as young as you, my dear. And I confess I'm a little tired, and very bored."

"You go, then, by all means, if they'll let you out. You all go," urged Katherine. "There are dozens of men here who'll look after me. Be glad to."

She smiled at Jack.

"Go along, Jack!" she said, her eyes suddenly lighting mischievously.

He smothered an oath.

"Little devil!" he growled. "You're too anxious to get us out of the way! You're up to something. I'm damned if I'll leave you here—not to-night! We all go or none of us goes!"

"We stay, then," said Katherine, dimpling.

Her heart ached for poor old Mr. Coleman, who really did look tired; but she could not go. If she attempted it, she knew, there would be trouble with Silvers—a row, perhaps, with Jack in his ugliest humor—a scene—and everything that Garry was trying to do would be rendered useless. So she powdered her nose, and rouged her lips, and went off with Stuyvie Nettleton—though she felt she must drop if she had to go on dancing.

And behind, at her table, her brother muttered grimly:

"Little devil! She has no heart!"

Silvers looked at his watch as he mounted the stairs to confront Fielding. It was a quarter past two.

"Well?" he asked gruffly, "where's Carpenter?"

"I left him behind at the apartment. Open this and I'll tell you what happened," answered Fielding.

Silvers opened the door to the little French drawing-room again, and they passed in.

"Well?" cried Silvers again.

"Read those!" said Fielding, handing him Katherine's letters.

He looked from them to Fielding, curiously, and began to read. His little eyes lighted feverishly. But he said nothing until he had read them all. Then—

"So," he said, "the little Kendail girl, after all, eh? I'd never have believed it—and yet—you never can tell! Women are like that! Soft as silk on top and hell underneath! Well?"

Fielding faced him.

"We read those letters back there in Da Costa's apartment," he said in a low voice. "Carpenter was all for destroying them without any one else's seeing them, but I wouldn't stand for it! We had a scrap—and I left him locked up there, and brought them. They're yours to use in any way you see fit. But there's one condition. You've got to let Joan and me beat it now, and no one is to mention that we were here at all!"

Silvers frowned.

"But no one was to get out before dawn!"

"Hell, I was out," cried Fielding; "and no one'll miss Joan. We can sneak by the same way that we went before. Anyway, that's the condition. It's either that or I tear up the letters!"

He confronted Silvers grimly.

"All right," said Silvers.

After all, it was all one to him, whether Joan got off free or was held for the murder. All he cared about was that somebody should be held. In fact, if it turned out to be Katherine Kendall, the result might be distinctly to his advantage. There was plenty of Kendall money—enough to keep the whole thing pretty quiet. Murder cases had been hushed up in New York before. But if Joan turned out to be guilty—she would certainly stand trial, and there would

be publicity—scandal—talk. It would certainly be the end of the King of Clubs. With the evidence all against Katherine—he had at least a chance.

"I'll send for her immediately," he said finally.

"No, I'll send," said Fielding, and he went to the foot of the stairs and asked Charlie to tell Miss Olcott that Mr. Fielding wanted a word with her. When she appeared, he spoke the word. It was "Come!"

Silvers opened the door for them, behind the mirror that swung outward, and they slipped away, Fielding leading down the iron steps, Joan holding up her heavy fur wrap as she went. And downstairs in the supper room, Katherine danced, unaware of the abyss that was opening before her tiny feet.

## CHAPTER XV.

BOUND, GAGGED, AND UNCONSCIOUS.

WHEN Fielding tied Garry up fast in the heavy portière cords and abandoned him, unconscious, on the floor of Da Costa's bedchamber, he felt that for some hours to come that individual would be in no position to interfere further with his plans.

But one so often reckons what may transpire without taking destiny into consideration. I call it destiny; some men call it fate; some men call it luck. But all men have in mind the same strange combination of events over which one has no control—the seemingly inexplicable bringing together of individuals who meet inevitably to influence one another's lives.

We seem to exercise free will in making our decisions, in our words and deeds and yet, sometimes long afterward, we are able to trace back the sequence of events, and we find that what we have said or done has been brought about by something that we or some one else has said or done—and so on backward, until the whole thing forms a complete and connected whole—a pattern easily discerned. And all this does not relieve us of any responsibility at all, but gives tremendous weight and importance to

## THE DANCE OF DEATH.

even the slightest things we do or say. One never knows from what insignificant beginning great developments will grow.

So, Fielding, fleeing from Da Costa's apartment, took no account of the woman whose small and very smart town car was at that very moment approaching the entrance. Indeed, if he had noticed the car, he probably would not have seen the woman herself, swathed in chinchilla, crouching nervously in the farther corner. For she was attempting to attract as little attention as possible. But if he had seen her, he would certainly have recognized her, and he might have changed his plans. Every one at all familiar with the world of society knew her by sight, for even in this day of changing orders and war fortunes, her financial and social standing remained unchanged.

No other woman of her importance would have ventured to drive to Da Costa's rooms in her own car; but this woman realized the futility and the danger of attempting subterfuge and disguise. Her system was to disarm suspicion by acting openly.

The uniformed attendants in the hallway bowed low before her and assured her that she was expected. With a smile and a gracious little nod of her head, she crossed to the lift and mounted to Da Costa's floor.

The elevator descended immediately after she stepped-out. She drew a latchkey from her hand bag and let herself in.

Finding the lights on, she advanced slowly and looked about her.

"Guy? Are you there?" she called softly.

Her voice was soft and low and charmingly modulated; but it echoed strangely in the empty rooms. She sensed something out of the ordinary somewhere, and felt suddenly, unaccountably, nervous. Recalling what the servants had said about her being expected, she wondered. Deep within her there stirred that distrust of Da Costa that she had always so firmly suppressed. She was aware that her position here was a precarious one. Her presence here could not be satisfactorily explained. Discovery meant destruction—swift, complete, appalling. She had known that from the very beginning. But, weary of the mo-

notony of her days—the dreary waste of her life—the emptiness of it—she had taken the risk. Of course there were moments of weakness—qualms; but they were always afterward.

She stood motionless, listening. But there was no sound. It occurred to her that Da Costa may have left the lights on for her, although this was not his custom. And in any case, certainty, she felt, would be better than this suspense.

She crossed the room slowly to the bedroom and looked in. And with a gasp of dismay she drew back, staring at the man on the floor. She recognized him at first glance.

*Garret Carpenter!* Bound and unconscious—on the floor in Da Costa's rooms! What did it mean?

She advanced and bent over him, fearfully. But he still lived. She unfastened his bonds with swift, steady fingers and lifted his head. He opened his eyes—vaguely—and looked at her. He seemed not to recognize her at once.

"Garry!" she cried anxiously. "What is it? What has happened? Are you ill?"

He still stared—with a slight frown—knitted brows. He was making a terrific effort to regain control of his faculties.

"Louise!" he said finally, recognizing her.

He spoke with difficulty; his mouth was dry, and he was conscious of an unpleasant nausea.

"Yes," said the woman.

His eyes wandered around the room.

"Oh!" he cried then, as realization swept over him. "Fielding? Is he gone?"

"I don't know. I think so. There seems to be no one else here. You were tied up and I released you!"

"It was good of you," said Garry, struggling to smile. "In return I shall release you, too."

"Release me?" she repeated, thinking that his mind was wandering.

"Yes," he said, "from the toils of the serpent."

She grew paler. He raised himself slowly, and held his head.

"Oh!" he groaned again.

"You are ill!" she cried.

"Not really. He stuck me with something. A drug, I think. My head is whirling—and I feel a little upset. I'll be all right in a minute, I think. How long have you been here?"

"I just came—scarcely five minutes ago!"

"What time is it now?"

She looked at her wrist watch set with diamonds.

"Two o'clock," said Louise.

"A. M.?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Thank God! I have only been 'out' a few minutes, then! There's still a lot of time."

He leaned back with a sigh. She brought him a pillow and placed it under his head.

"Thanks," said Garry, and then shook his head at her. "Isn't life extraordinary?" he said. "I don't know any one I'd least prefer to see here than you—and yet—you've probably saved me—and others—as well as yourself by coming just now, as you did!"

"I don't understand exactly," said Louise.

"No," he said, "you couldn't possibly. I'm going to tell you!"

He drew a long breath and steeled himself for the effort.

"Da Costa has been murdered," he said.

"Murdered?" she repeated. She had fallen into a low chair near the bed. She leaned forward, now, her hands clenched on the arms of the chair, and she went white to the lips. Her dark eyes stared out at him in terror. "My God!" she whispered hoarsely. "My God!"

"Stabbed by some one—identity unknown—in a little retiring room at the King of Clubs to-night!" went on Garry. "In order to save all sorts of scandal, I induced the proprietor—Nat Silvers—to let me search out the murderer before he notified the police. By some lucky chance, Da Costa himself had arranged that the opening celebration at the café should last all night to-night, and that no one should be permitted to leave before daylight—so we know that the guilty person is there and can't get out until the doors are opened."

"But you—" she broke in swiftly.

"Came here with young Moffat Fielding to look for evidence. We found some letters."

"Whose letters?" she asked in a whisper.

"Katherine Kendall's."

"Oh!" There was relief as well as comprehension in the sound.

"I wanted to destroy them. Fielding didn't! He struck me with a hypodermic needle, I think, and then—tied me up here while he went back with the letters. They must never be made public. They seem to incriminate Katherine—and you know—we all know—it would be impossible for her to kill any one."

The woman opposite him lay back, looking very tired. Her dark lashes hid her eyes.

"She has been madly infatuated with him," she said, "and jealous of me. So jealous that I have had to come—like this—secretly—at night—to see him at all. One never knows what a woman will do—under certain circumstances. We—we have no sense of honor, you know—no scruples—no morals or ethics, I am afraid. The worst and the best of us! We are all alike, really! Only some are braver than others. All of us—we have only *feeling*—emotions."

Garry sat up and stared at her.

"Do you mean you think it might have been Katherine?" he asked.

"Why not—if he goaded her sufficiently. He knew how to handle women. It might have been Katherine. It might even have been I."

"And there never lived a woman more perfectly poised, you must admit—more perfectly mistress of herself!" she added. "Yet there have been moments when I could have wrung his neck in my two hands. He had the faculty of arousing the worst in us—the most violent—elemental things. You see, my dear Garry, your conception of love is the conventional, civilized conception; but women are not civilized. We do not think! Men think! Women only feel. And Da Costa had a way of swaying us to our depths. And at the very foundation, you know, love is not very far removed from hate, especially when jealousy enters in."

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He was shaken by this calm woman in the chair—shaken by her weary manner of repeating things as though they were old, old truths—shaken by her resignation and her despair. It was not that she gave any indication of her grief. He felt it. There was no sign of it anywhere about her.

"No, no!" he cried protestingly, "I can't believe she did it—I can't! It's too monstrous! To pick up a knife on the floor below and carry it up there with her—to face him—to strike—driving it into his throat with such force. She couldn't have! She couldn't have!"

The woman opposite shrugged.

"She could," she corrected him patiently; "but perhaps she didn't! There were plenty of others who might just as easily have done it."

"If you could only name them," breathed Garry eagerly. "I'm sure Katherine is innocent! I believe in her! And I must save her! If you could only help me! If you could only name me *one* who had reasons to kill him—and the desire to! Just one!"

She smiled and opened her eyes. He was startled at the cold gleam in them.

"Yes," she said, "I can name you one who not only had the motive and the wish—but who even swore to do it."

"Who was it?" cried Garry. "Tell me!"

"My husband," said the woman opposite. "And he was at the King of Clubs to-night!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

## HE MUST PAY THE PENALTY.

GARRY stood staring, incredulously. "Your husband threatened Da Costa's life—and he was at the King of Clubs to-night?" he repeated, brushing one hand nervously through his hair.

She remained quite calm—curiously calm.

"Yes," she said.

"Then he is still there!"

"Yes. No one was to leave before dawn.

Guy planned that trick especially to keep him there—while we kept tryst here. He

was to come back immediately after his dance was finished."

"So that was why he planned the all-night-long session?"

"Yes. My husband had been growing suspicious lately. He had begun to suspect me of being too interested in Guy. I dare say gossip had reached his ears. At any rate—I had had a few unpleasant scenes with him. When he is drunk, he is not a very amiable person. But you know him, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Garry, nodding.

"One can endure scenes that are caused because somebody loves one and is jealous. There is even something gratifying in them—flattering to one's vanity. But when scenes are caused just because of wounded pride, they are distinctly annoying. You see, George has never really cared for me. You know! There has been a succession of mistresses. He has made no effort to conceal that fact from me, although, of course, I should have found out even if he had. The social sheets nowadays keep one informed."

Garry nodded again.

"He didn't love me. But he didn't want me to have any other lover. He married me because he thought the match a suitable one, and that I would make a worthy successor to his mother—a worthy mother to his children. But I never had any children. My life has been empty. I have tried for years to find contentment in my charitable works—my social duties and obligations. But such things are poor substitutes. And all the while George was finding life very agreeable indeed. So, when I met Guy, I felt no compunction in holding the marriage ties as lightly as George holds them. I decided that I owed him no greater consideration or loyalty than he has given me. He could not see things that way. He soon heard of my acquaintance with Guy, and demanded that I give Guy up. I refused. We had a succession of really quite melodramatic scenes, culminating in a climax to-night. I told him that I was going to leave him and go away with Guy!"

"You told him that to-night?"

"Yes," said the woman quietly, "at din-

ner. You've dined with us! You know our long, narrow table? Well, George was at the head of it, and I at the foot—alone together—miles apart. Or so it seemed. There were servants, of course, in attendance—and George respects and fears servants. He is terrified of their tongues; so when—in the intervals that we were alone—I told him calmly that I was going to leave him and go away with Guy, he was powerless. He would have liked to strangle me, but he dared not. The servants were within call. He would have liked to rant and swear and smash things. But he was afraid of what the servants would say. He is a slow-thinking man—George. He ended by leaning forward and hissing at me in a whisper: 'If you do that, I'll *kill* the fellow, and swear that I struck him down in defense of my home! *They always acquit one for that!*' I think George is probably the only man who could think of avenging his honor and saving his skin at the same identical moment!"

She smiled.

"But surely he was not in earnest," protested Garry.

"Oh, yes, indeed he was! He is just the type of man who would mean it—who would *do* it, too. You *know* him, Garret—thick-necked, heavy, stolid, vicious, with no saving sense of humor. God defend me from men without a sense of humor! And then—his tremendous ego—his colossal vanity. He would infinitely prefer to shed blood—somebody *else's* blood—than to cut a poor figure in the public eye. And he resented my preferring Guy to him. He would not have had the *world* know it—for anything!"

"And he is at the King of Clubs tonight?"

"Yes—most likely with his latest mistress. He adores showing them off at such places. It makes him seem so awfully wicked. You must have seen him dancing with them. I have, myself, a few times. He always has them beautifully turned out and hung with diamonds. Poor things! He never keeps them long! I have always pitied them. They earn whatever they get from him. He must bore them frightfully. He's *so dull!*"

Garry felt underneath this calm, cynical exterior the woman's terrific feeling—knew that she was maintaining her composure, only because it had become second nature to her to do so—because it was her tradition not to yield—because generations of breeding had bestowed upon her this perfect poise. He wondered how she had ever come to marry such a man—in spite of his millions, his importance. She must have been so lovely—before her first freshness had gone—her features were still fine, and she had that distinction of bearing, that perfect grooming that is rarer and more precious than mere physical prettiness.

"Well," she said slowly, rising, "I have given you my testimony. It is for you to follow it up. All I can add is this: If George killed him—if you can succeed in making that fact clear—he shall not escape punishment! On that point I am determined. I believe there is something in the law which prevents a wife from testifying against her husband—but if I must divorce him to do it—I will go on the stand and tell the truth about this! I will tell just what George has made of my life—how he has neglected me—flaunted his disgraceful affairs in my face—humiliated me—denied me affection and children—and I will repeat under oath what he said to me at dinner—'I will kill him and swear that I struck in defense of my home'—in defense of his home—think of it—'because they *always acquit one for that!*'"

"You're not in earnest!" cried Garry. "You couldn't appear against your husband in your lover's defense!"

"It is the only thing I can do now—for Guy," she said.

"But you will be publicly disgraced—reviled—ostracized! Public opinion will be against you!"

She shrugged.

"Public opinion?" she murmured grimly. "Who cares. Can public opinion give me happiness? Can it give me peace of mind? Can it cure the ache in my heart? *Damn public opinion!*"

He laid his hand on her arm.

"You are upset, now," he said gently; "excited, laboring under a great strain. This affair has been a shock to you. Go

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home and rest—and think it all over very carefully before you decide upon *any* course of action. After all, it cannot aid Guy if your husband pays the death penalty.”

“But it is *just*!” she cried. “He has had his own way so long—in everything! He has ridden rough-shod over so many! If he has killed Guy, not his influence, nor his money—nothing shall save him! *He must pay the penalty!*”

“Well,” said Garry slowly, “that is your problem—for you to decide! I must get back to Katherine!”

“I’ll go with you,” said the woman.

“Hadh’t you better go home and rest?”

“I have no home. I have had my things packed and sent to the station. My maids have been packing since dinner time. I have some hand luggage and my maid at an hotel!”

“Go there, then, and go to bed. Get some sleep. I’ll telephone you or drop in and see you as soon as anything definite is known.”

“I couldn’t sleep,” she replied, with a shake of her head. “Take me back with you. I want to be where everything is going on—where Guy is.”

“Very well,” he agreed finally.

Her car was waiting—the car in which she had meant to carry Da Costa off. They drove back to the club. And they arrived at the foot of the iron stairway just as Fielding and Joan reached it, coming down.

“Go back!” cried Garry quietly, barring their way.

They halted, at that, in some dismay, and Fielding muttered an oath under his breath.

“If you don’t want trouble with the police—go back, I tell you,” repeated Garry. “It’s not going to look well, you know—your sneaking off like this! It looks pretty much like a confession of guilt!”

“Damn you,” growled Fielding, “I thought I put you out!”

“Not quite,” answered Garry. “I’m still on the job, you see—and I advise you to stick! You won’t get far, I warn you, before the police will be on your trail. Better wait around!”

“I agree with him, Moffie! I think we’d better” put in Joan.

“All right,” agreed Fielding with small grace. They turned and retraced their steps. Garry followed them. The woman with him brought up the rear. They had had no chance to see her distinctly down there in the dark, but when they reached the top again, and knocked on the door—and when it swung back, under Silvers’s guiding hand, the light fell full upon her—and they stared in blank amazement.

“Mrs. Milburne,” gasped Silvers, and with a low bow ushered her in.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE GRANDEUR OF THE PAST.

THE day of permanent aristocracies is past. Even in the older countries over seas, the peasant classes are no longer willing to toil in order to support a class of idlers and wasters. Dukes and earls are going to work. Countesses are opening shops and going into the motion pictures. And it is impossible to work for a living and still play the society game. The society game requires a good deal of time. Besides the round of teas and dinners and balls, there are the races, the seasonal resorts, the shooting parties and house parties and hunts. It costs a fortune, too, to maintain establishments. Indeed, social position cannot endure without funds—more funds nowadays than ever before. And money is harder come by, in this age. So even over seas the game of society is pretty nearly played out. In the United States of America it has practically disappeared. Fortunes are made and lost so rapidly over here. Values are always changing. Everything is always changing, for new peoples are constantly coming in at Ellis Island, with new ideas, new ambitions, and a burning desire to achieve and conquer.

Yesterday’s immigrant grows softer to-day, as he rises above the necessity to do hard labor. To-morrow he will be well off, sending his sons and daughters to colleges and smart schools. And as they rise in the social scale, they will become less able to compete with the newcomers who are more hardened, who have yet to win place. The

order is always changing. To-day's millionaires grown fat and gullible fall into the hands of to-morrow's millionaires who are still hard and shrewd; just as the sons of to-morrow's millionaires will fall into the hands of the immigrants or their sons who are landing to-day. They come, they work, they rise, they fall.

The great town mansions are torn down to leave room for office buildings, and the men who build the office buildings build new mansions in another section; the Fifth Avenue families of yesterday are gone, their names almost forgotten; the Park Avenue families of to-day engage the public eye in restaurants and opera boxes. By way of Palm Beach and Paris and London, new aspirants appear to-day to shine for an hour and then vanish. Newport has already given way to Southampton. No one nowadays dictates the fashions or says who shall and who shall not be "in"! And these things are natural and fitting in a country "for the people, by the people"! There can never be a permanent upper class here; the places at the top are for those who can and want to occupy them. "Money" is the password to the magic circle.

But time was when the old families—chiefly the old families of Dutch stock—had most of the big fortunes in New York and formed "society." In those days the Milburnes rose to prominence! And by amazingly shrewd investments, and clever alliances, they managed to hold their place, long after the older families had drifted into oblivion. True, the Milburne fortune, once enormous, was now scarcely a fortune at all—as fortunes go nowadays—but the Milburne name was known far and wide. Young George Milburne had been a famous spendthrift at college. His gambling exploits, his racing stables had filled much space in Sunday newspapers. In consequence the Milburne name was synonymous with millions. The Milburne millions made such a pleasing phrase. That was why even at the King of Clubs the advent of Mrs. George Stuyvesant Milburne created something of a sensation. For Mrs. George Stuyvesant Milburne was one of the last of the social celebrities.

Not that she was old. She was still in her early forties, but she belonged to the days that are past—the pre-war days, when there was still a Four Hundred, and Newport was its stronghold; and she managed to look less than her years without relinquishing her dignity or grace or charm.

She was no bobbed-haired woman in short skirts. She was slender, and moved with ease and lightness. Her brown hair, showing yet no trace of gray, was smoothly coiffed, and gleamed like burnished copper. She was rather pale, as women go nowadays, and her great gray eyes were the most significant feature of her face. She dressed always in soft clinging things that suited her, and no one ever stopped to wonder whether they conformed to the moment's styles or not. She always looked well, and "smart," too. And because she was a personality, she was recognized everywhere for what she was; no one ever mistook her for anything else. And this, quite regardless of the fact that—since her marriage—she had been extensively photographed. Her name was known wherever the fashion and society periodicals circulate.

At the King of Clubs—and the other places that Silvers had established—George Stuyvesant Milburne was a frequent visitor, a fairly well-known and familiar sight; but Mrs. George Stuyvesant Milburne was a stranger, indeed. Accordingly, her entrance with Garret Carpenter astounded Silvers.

"We need not go in there and face the crowd, need we?" she asked, indicating the supper rooms with a little jerk of her head. "Isn't there an office—or something?"

"Yes. This way," said Silvers, almost obsequiously, leading.

They all followed him, finding themselves presently in a very small, very businesslike room, furnished only with a few chairs, a few cabinets, and a desk. On the desk was a silver-framed photograph of Mrs. Nat Silvers and two little Silveresses. It was the only human note in the room.

"It is quiet here, at least," said Louise, sinking into the revolving chair by the desk with a little sigh.

Joan sat opposite, rather sulkily; she had not been exactly ignored by Louise,

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but then again she had not been especially noticed or addressed, and she was feeling slightly resentful. She observed with satisfaction that her jewels were more expensive and striking than Louise's, and that her furs were much more luxurious. Everything about her, in fact, was "much more." There was some comfort in that.

Fielding waited with brooding impatience; Silvers and Garry seemed to be deferring to Louise in perfect accord.

"Will you have some champagne, Mrs. Milburne?" asked Silvers hospitably. "We have some very fine wines. Even your husband admits that!"

"George would know," admitted Louise grimly, and then—"Yes, I think I would like a glass. Something quite dry, please, and nicely chilled!"

Silvers delightedly gave the order at the door.

"And you might send for my husband," added Louise quietly, following him with her eyes.

Silvers called the waiter back and summoned George Milburne. Mrs. Milburne's gaze came back then, to drift from Fielding's lowering face to Joan's sullen one.

"I don't really think we need detain these—er—young people," she said. "I hear the music and it sounds delightful. I am sure they will be wanting to dance!"

"In other words, we're not wanted," said Joan, rising. "I get you, Mrs. Milburne. Come, Moffie! Let's go!"

"But only as far as your table!" cautioned Garry. "We may have to send for you again!"

"All right," growled Fielding, and they passed out.

"That girl—surely I've seen her somewhere! With George, perhaps?" asked Louise Milburne.

"Perhaps," answered Garry.

"She's rather pretty," said Louise. "And the boy?"

"Young Moffat Fielding! I told you about him and Katherine's letters!"

"Ah—yes," murmured Louise, recalling.

"I suppose," said Garry, turning to Silvers, "he has turned those letters over to you, now?"

"I have them—yes," admitted Silvers.

"You've read them?"

"Yes," admitted Silvers, with some reluctance.

"And in exchange for them you were letting Fielding go. You meant to hold Miss Kendall?"

"Well, yes," admitted Silvers, his back against the wall. "I've got to hold somebody! And the letters make the case against Miss Kendall look pretty bad! Besides, if she's at the bottom of this, well, there mightn't be so much fuss raised as if it had been Joan Olcott or John Smith!"

"I see. You are depending upon the Kendall money and influence. You think if you can get her in the same boat with you, you might save your skin!"

"Something like that," nodded Silvers defiantly.

"Of course. Self preservation, you know, Garry. You can't blame Mr. Silvers," murmured Louise. And turning with a smile to the little man, she added: "May I see those letters?"

He looked distressed and extremely grieved.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Milburne," he said. "But I've got them locked in my safe. I really can't risk losing them. You see, I took a long chance in not calling in the police as soon as this murder was discovered—and I'm going to have one hell of a time squaring myself *now*—without getting in any deeper."

"I quite understand," said Louise. "I just wondered if I chanced to be mentioned in them."

Silvers colored and looked at Garry; Garry nodded.

"There is one mention of a woman named Louise," said he. "But of course it could not be Mrs. Milburne."

"What was the mention?" asked Louise.

"Oh, Katherine writes that she happened to be passing Da Costa's apartment at two o'clock—going home from the Rainesford's dance—and that she saw 'Louise' just coming out."

Mrs. Milburne sat frowning.

"I suppose it would be quite impossible to—to suppress that one letter?" she reflected.

"Yes—quite," answered Garry

"Yes—quite," she repeated. "And after all—it doesn't really matter, does it? I was in Da Costa's apartment the night of the Rainesfords dance—and many other nights. Why deny it? After all, what is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose, is it not, my dear George?"

Her eyes wandered to the doorway, where her husband stood—crimson with rage. He had overheard.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### HIS DEATH SHALL BE AVENGED.

"WHAT are you saying?" cried George Milburne, in a choking voice. "You have been in Da Costa's apartments—"

"Many times," she finished for him, coolly. "Come in, George, and don't excite yourself. We have had scenes enough. What we have to say to one another—all of us—we can say quietly, I am sure. We are more or less intelligent human beings, after all!"

He made an effort to control himself, and came in, and closed the door behind him. At first, hearing her words, he forgot where he was, in the wave of rage and hate that overwhelmed him. But now his caution reasserted itself. So he carefully closed the door behind him and scowled from his wife to Garry and Silvers, who were intently regarding him.

"You sent for me?" he asked of them all.

"Yes," said Louise Milburne, nodding. "Do you know why, George?"

"Why?" he asked.

"I asked you if you knew why?" she repeated patiently.

"No. How should I know."

He was a thickset little man, portly rather than fat; kept in condition by Turkish baths and golf and what not. His hair was thin, his neck was thick, he had puffs under his eyes, and very loose, sensual lips half hidden by a neat mustache. He was always immaculate, but he never had the clean, well-groomed look. His dinner clothes fitted him rather trimly to give him some semblance of a figure: and he always

wore a white carnation in the buttonhole of his left coat lapel. He was renowned for that white carnation. Indeed, it had got to be rather a joke that he should wear white—who was so far from pure in word, thought or deed. An obstinate, self-centered, pompous, egotistical little man, a vicious man, a dangerous man when he could not have his own way. Once he had caned a chauffeur, and it had cost a small fortune to hush the matter up. The chauffeur's arm had been broken at the elbow and had remained stiff, rendering him unfit for further driving. And once Milburne had locked a girl in a cupboard—as a joke, he explained afterward—and she had been rescued hours later—a shrieking, gibbering wreck. He was not quite a nice man; but he was very rich. And when Louise Garland had married him—her first season "out"—it had been generally agreed that she was "doing well."

She regarded him now as she was wont to regard him, with rather amused, cynical, half-closed eyes. He hated the way she looked at him; but there was really nothing one could do about a thing like that.

"We sent for you, George," she said, "to find out what you know about Guy da Costa's murder!"

He caught his breath and whitened.

"Murder?" he repeated. His eyes went from her curiously, searchingly, to Silvers's face, to Garry's. Then suddenly he chuckled, finding confirmation in the expressions of the men.

"Murdered, eh?" he said. "That's one on you, old girl! What?"

"It may prove to be one on you," she answered suavely.

"On me?" he cried, opening his eyes.

"Perhaps you forget," she said, "that you threatened his life—only to-night at dinner!"

He frowned.

"I was joking," he protested. "At least you were getting me excited. This is a hell of a time to bring things like that up, I must say! And anyway—nobody heard me but you."

"He doesn't deny that he *did* threaten Da Costa's life. You understand that," said Louise, turning to Garry.

Garry nodded. Milburne went livid.

"I say—what's the idea of all this?" he gasped, with an attempt to recover his dignity.

"The idea is that we are trying to discover who killed Guy da Costa," said Garry.

"And you suspect *me*?" gasped Milburne.

"Certainly, that is a possibility," rejoined Garry.

"In that case," said Milburne slowly, "I can say nothing further until I have consulted with my attorneys."

His eyes wandered to Louise, and he glared at her with a gleam of hate in them.

"However," he added, "my memory is quite as good as yours, my dear; and I shall not forget what you said—also in the presence of these gentlemen—in regard to your visits to Da Costa's rooms!"

"Oh, if you are thinking of divorce," she observed, smiling, "our lawyers can soon come to terms. Don't think that your own conduct in the past few years has escaped my attention—or the attention of the detectives I have had following you. I have quite a little history of your adventures in case I should ever be called upon to produce them."

He glared at her.

"*Detectives?*" he repeated, choking.

"Yes, detectives, my dear George," she responded. "I see the prospect of having your private life spied upon is an unpleasant one to a person of your refinement and cultivated tastes. No doubt you shun publicity, too. You poor, bungling imbecile! You fool! Did you think I would let you go on humiliating me indefinitely? Did you think I thrived on your neglect and abuse? No, I only went on living in your house because there was no other man I wanted, and it was simpler to hold my place. But when I found a man that meant more to me—I was ready. You didn't think you held me all these years, did you? *You* killed what feeling I had for you on our wedding night. I have just endured you since then. God, how you have disgusted me, and bored me. And how you have amused me, too. My dear George, I know it says in the marriage

ceremony 'till death us do part'; but with a man like you—well, one cannot take that seriously. Life often parts as well as death. And being loyal to you would be wasting loyalty. One shouldn't waste anything as fine as that. You never wanted a companion—a helpmate—a wife—a mother for your children. You relinquished the right to have children, but *I* didn't. I am a woman, and I deserve whatever is best in life. I was nineteen when I married you. *Nineteen!* In my ignorant, childish way I thought I loved you. I married you because I wanted a husband—some one to take care of me—to guard me and guide me. You wanted only a mate!"

"And you wanted *Guy da Costa*," he sneered.

She winced. "Yes—now. *Now!*" she cried; "but I am no longer the innocent girl of nineteen that you married. I am what you have made of me. I am the result of years of association with you. Guy da Costa was kind to me, and sweet and sympathetic. And he was young—and beautiful—and strong. My lost youth cried out for him. He appealed to my imagination. He recalled the dreams I used to dream before I knew you."

"You are shameless!" roared Milburne, enraged.

"No, ashamed," she corrected him; "ashamed of you, and of the years I've endured you and countenanced you! But I'm through now! Do you hear? *Through!* If you've killed Guy—as you *threatened* to—you've taken the one thing from me that I wanted—that I *cared* about. And you've gone too far! I'm going to see that you're punished! I'm going to see that you pay! I tell you—and I mean this—the murderer of Guy da Costa—whether it was *you* or any one else—has got to answer to *me!*"

He stood silent, abashed, overwhelmed by her fury, which was greater than his own. All three men regarded her with something like awe—this stern, dominating woman—demanding justice and spurning deceit or disguise or subterfuge. Regardless of public opinion, or marriage laws, she loved Guy da Costa, and she acknowledged it, with head held high and she de-

clared herself the champion of his cause. The pity of it was that she should have thrown away such a passion upon a worthless scamp like Da Costa. The world is so full of finer men; but somehow they rarely arouse a woman to such a pitch of feeling. It is very strange.

"You don't mean to make public all this?" asked George Milburne finally. There was an agony of anxiety and appeal in his voice now. He was facing a force with which he and the Milburne millions could not cope.

"Yes, all of it," she answered. "I don't care who suffers or goes down! *His death* shall be avenged!"

"But what's the *use*?" protested Milburne. "I'm sure to be acquitted. I only threatened—I didn't really kill him. You'd need more proof than that to send me to the chair—convenient as that might be to you. And you can't produce any proof. I've been with Mable all the evening. I haven't left her once. You can easily verify that. And if you go in for all this publicity—what 'll happen to you afterward? Where'll you live? Who'll be able to know you?"

She shrugged.

"It is useless for you to argue," she said. "My mind is made up! At any cost—I'm going to get to the bottom of this and see that the murderer *pays*!"

"God, what a position for me!" gasped Milburne, breaking out into cold perspiration.

"We might send for Mable—and question her," suggested Garry suddenly.

"She could be paid to furnish him an alibi," answered Louise.

"But no one has had time to prompt her or bribe her," objected Silvers.

"The murderer has—if he came prepared to do the thing!" she reminded them. "All that could have been arranged beforehand. You don't know George! He has no brains; but he has a certain canny shrewdness, especially where his own personal comfort and safety are concerned!"

"But I tell you I didn't *do* this!" cried Milburne. "I had no reason to bribe Mable. In fact, I didn't even *want* to kill Da Costa—afterward!"

"Afterward? After *what*?" asked Louise.

"After I left the house and joined Mable. She told me what Da Costa was really up to, and I was so tickled to think you were being double-crossed that I wanted to see the thing through and have the laugh on you!"

"Double-crossed?" repeated Garry. Louise merely stared.

"Yes. It seems Mable knew all about it. He told her and she told me—in confidence, of course. Da Costa was planning to leave my dear wife flat and elope with Katherine Kendall!"

"It's not true," whispered Louise, going white to the lips.

"If you don't believe me, ask Mable," said Milburne triumphantly.

Louise turned to Garry.

"Send for Mable," she said.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MAN WHO STOPPED BLEEDING.

BARTLETT recovered consciousness slowly, to find himself still lying across his table, among the china and glass-ware and crumpled flowers. Thanks to the protection afforded by the surrounding palms, to the loud beat and thump and swing of the music, his collapse had remained undiscovered. Silvers's well-trained waiters were not in the habit of hovering too near. The patrons of his resorts preferred not to be disturbed. So Bartlett was able to right himself cautiously, unseen—to wet his dry mouth with champagne and lean back as though nothing had happened. His first thought was for the wound in his side. *It had stopped bleeding!*

A little cry of satisfaction escaped his lips as he realized this—a warm glow of triumph suffused him.

If the wound had stopped bleeding he had still a good chance to escape! He put from him all thought of exonerating the woman they suspected. Time enough to think of that later—if she was actually threatened with the death penalty. But he told himself that women seldom were.

True, there was still the blood stain on

## THE DANCE OF DEATH.

his shirt! That must be hidden. His coat and waistcoat no longer covered it. As long as he could keep the napkin before him he was safe; but how was he going to cross the floor? He must wait until the rest had gone. He must pretend he had fallen asleep. In any case, he would be stronger then. He felt that he might risk a little more champagne, now. And as he sipped it he looked about him.

He saw the red-haired girl, Mable, leave her partner as Garry cut in. And a moment later he saw them leave the floor. He recalled that red-haired girl. She was—she had been Da Costa's dancing partner. So they must be sending for *her* now. He looked at his watch. Ten minutes to three. Only an hour or so till daybreak!

He smiled.

If he won, he told himself, he would go to Da Costa's funeral and take a last look at him before they laid him away forever. *Forever!* That was a strange thought! His career ended for good and all. But it was no great loss to civilization. And he had been an opponent—an enemy. Was it not a duel they were fighting—even now?

He remembered that murderers always haunt the vicinity of their victims or the scene of the crimes; but he could not deny himself the satisfaction of attending the funeral, whether it was a risk or not; he owed himself that much.

His eye followed the whirling colors on the dance floor. It was kaleidoscopic—bewildering—fascinating; all swirling yellows and greens and blues and lavenders; reds and silvers and golds and blacks and whites. And through the smoky-blue air strange exotic perfumes drifted to his nostrils. He drank them in. And the music thrummed and beat and moaned and sobbed and sighed with passionate abandon. This was life—lived to the utmost. And upstairs was death!

Odd how his mind wandered. He had never thought much about death before. It was just the end of things; the night's rest after a long day. But that was the death that came gently and kindly to man in the twilight of his years. Not death as Da Costa had met it—struggling painfully—crying out in fear. He scorned Da Costa

for that. One who had lived so boldly should have died boldly—with a laugh on his lips. That was Bartlett's creed. He told himself that if the dead man won the duel, and his crime were traced home to him—if he were tried and convicted, and sentenced to the chair, he would show them how nonchalantly, how indifferently, how carelessly a man could die. For him the great going out had no terrors. He rather anticipated it as a new and strange adventure. For if there were nothing—what matter? He would never know. And if there were another life to live, well, he surely could not find it less interesting than he had found this. It was all in the way you looked at things—all in the way you played the game! Himself, he had never been a poor loser. He had always been a sport. He scorned a quitter or a welcher or a coward!

Every man has his own philosophy of life, whether it is formulated in words or not! Every man has his own creed. Bartlett's creed was—"Play the game!" And he was playing it now, with every ounce of strength that there was in him.

And the dancer danced; and the orchestra played; and men and women flirted and laughed and whispered together; each was intent upon his own affairs. Nobody else in the room even noticed Harry Bartlett.

Katherine stole a glance at her tiny wrist-watch set in diamonds—and noted the time, too, and calculated swiftly how much longer her martyrdom would last. Her martyrdom? Was this really the worst that she must suffer? It seemed to her now that she could endure nothing more. Yet, she knew that one never realizes how much one can bear until the necessity arises. From somewhere deep within us, new reservoirs of endurance are tapped. If Garry should fail—and they should actually arrest her—she would face the outcome bravely. There would simply be nothing else for her to do.

In her early girlhood she had wept over the French revolution and the brave, careless, laughing, singing aristocrats who had mounted the guillotine so airily. But now, as she danced close—close against young

Coleman's breast, her cheek on his, after the fashion of the day, she contemplated the possibility of mounting the steps of gray stone to that dreadful chair fitted with straps and bands of steel. Would she have courage for that?

It was like some weird nightmare—this vision of herself paying the supreme penalty for murder. It was so unlikely a thing to befall her—Katherine Kendall! And now it was threatening her. The shadow of it was already looming large. Hours had passed, and still Garry had not come to tell her she was free. And only seventy minutes more remained. Seventy minutes more of this! And then—*what?*

Policemen? The Tombs? Or home again—her lovely gray-walled room, with its hangings of turquoise blue—her maid yawning by the fire—her dressing table with its gold-topped bottles, its gold-backed mirror and brushes, its gold-framed photographs; her white fur mules, and chiffony *peignoir*, her blossomy bed with its silken coverlets and dozens of soft, embroidered pillows. Oh, the security of that room as she visualized it now. Oh, the sweet serenity of it—the tranquillity, the quiet, reserved respectability of it! Would she go back there and be free to stop smiling—to rest—to sleep and forget?

Tears welled up into her eyes; she dropped her thick lashes hastily and bit her lip; and buried her face against young Coleman's shoulder, clinging to him instinctively because he was big and strong.

The music swelled in crescendo; the musicians were singing to lend added stimulus to the dance:

"Oh, do it again!

I may say, 'No, no, no, no, no, no—'

But do it again!

My lips just ache to have you take the kiss

That's waiting for you—

You, know, if you do, you

Won't regret it. Come and get it,

Oh, no one is near!

I may say, 'Oh, oh, oh, oh, o-h!'

But no one will hear.

Ma-ma may scold me, 'cause she told me,

That it's naughty—but then—

Do it again! Please do it again!"

It ended with a crash; and the couples applauded violently, partly because they

were not weary of dancing yet, partly because the song—which had been sung by a famous French artiste—had caught on and was tremendously popular. The French artiste had sung it gorgeously—but very naughtily. The modern young revelers laughed delightedly over it, and hummed the haunting tune themselves as the orchestra began the encore.

Katherine thought of Garry. They had been together at one of Carson Winslowe's famous Sunday night parties the first time they had heard it. The composer had played it and sung it himself—and the famous French artiste, who had happened to be present, too, had cried out impulsively: "I mus' 'ave that song! You 'ear? I mus' 'ave that damned song!"

Garry had not liked it. He had applauded with the rest, of course, and smiled—but Katherine had seen by the expression in his eyes that he had not liked it; and she had been a bit amused at such mid-Victorianism in him. Now she saw him in quite another light. He was so safe and sane and fine! If she had only realized then what her escapade with Da Costa would cost her! If she had only thought it out for herself. They were all heading for hell! She saw it now! She saw it plainly! Only destruction could be the goal of all this! The music, barbaric, passionate, insinuating, vile—appealing to the lowest in one! The small, close room, garishly decorated! The dim lights! The heavy scent of flowers mingling with the more exotic scents of the women's perfumes; the smoke of cigarettes and cigars; the lowered voices; the rustle of chiffons; the flash of jewels and bare arms and backs and bosoms! It was hideous—indecent—depraved! She saw it all—as for the first time! Only death and destruction *could* come out of such a place!

"You're quiet," said young Coleman, smiling down at her, and holding her closer. "Are you happy?"

*Happy!*

"You'd be surprised!" she answered, slangily, but with significance.

And the jazz went on! *Jazz! Jazz!*

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



# With a Wink

By JOHN MONTAGUE

VIOLET STEELE, in flimsy kimono and Chinese sandals, shuffled in from the kitchenette. Her slender, white hands carried a delicate platter, at the center of which a single fried egg reposed like a sunlit oasis in a desert of china. Raising it aloft, as Salome did her silver salver with its terrible cargo, she swirled about the table in graceful imitation of that famous lady's contortions and placed it before her lord and master with a flourish that caused the sober-minded Oliver to smile in spite of his depression.

"Why eggs in the singular?" he asked paradoxically.

"Because eggs in the plural are hereafter taboo until you connect with something resembling an income."

"We are not as hard up as all that."

Ollie was amazed at the change in his wife. For the first two years of their married life she had spent with a hand as prodigal as that which scatters feed in a chicken

yard. Their apartment gave evidence of her extravagance. That is, he thought it extravagance, but her argument was that the best things are cheapest in the long run.

Then came the reverse. His company had smashed up. He was cast on the rocks, caught with a frightfully small balance. The income had stopped automatically. They had sold their car!

He could have gone to work easily enough, but Vie refused to let him accept a mere job. Nothing short of a "business connection" worthy his talents and personality would satisfy her. So they began to stick it out. They had been sticking it out for months. Vie had performed a finished flipflop. She had "got" economy. Instead of keeping her fingers spread wide apart in matters of money, she now clutched a penny till its imprint was left on her pink palm. Hence the singular egg, the toast without butter, the coffee without cream, the water without heat to shave with

and many other withouts too numerous to keep track of.

Oliver endured, but the strain was great. This frugality was grinding his nerves to shreds. Vie, on the contrary, retained her buoyancy of spirit. She never let down; at least, not in his presence. She met him with a smile and sent him off in the morning with a kiss. She treated their providence as a lark.

"There's no need going to extremes," protested Oliver mildly as he departed on the daily quest. "We're not altogether broke, you know." He took her smiling face in his hands and kissed her lovingly. "If I could only hit upon a good proposition—an investment—I feel sure Samuel Wellington would go in or back me."

"It won't hurt us to ease up on our menu," she replied, fixing his tie as she spoke. "You're too fat, anyway, and if I should lose ten pounds I could get back into those summer things of mine."

She waved to him from the back porch as he turned the corner to catch the street car.

The telephone rang. Mrs. Samuel Wellington was on the wire. She wished to know if Mr. and Mrs. Steele would dine with them that evening at their new home on the hill? Vie accepted with alacrity. She was delighted with the invitation and knew that her husband would be, too.

"That's fine," said Mrs. Wellington. "I'll send my new car for you at seven."

Mrs. Samuel Wellington was always getting something new—even husbands—and her whole life seemed to be devoted to showing off her latest acquisitions to her less favored acquaintances.

It was not so much of a coincidence that this bid to dinner should come so quickly on the heels of Oliver's reference to the Wellington family as it might appear, for Vie had been working toward just such social intimacy for several months. She wanted to bring her husband and successful Samuel Wellington into closer contact, and her crafty little scheme appeared to be bearing fruit.

She dressed and regarded herself in the mirror. Some one had once said that she could look good in anything, but as she spied her shadow on this particular morn-

ing she was ready to doubt the sincerity of the compliment. Her clothes were *chic* enough and not altogether out of style, but her hat was downright frowzy. It was an abomination, a positive crime.

She was ready to suffer the cruellest hardships of poverty like a true martyr, and even die in the cause of a necessary economy, but that hat was too much to bear! It was the straw that spilled her cup of misery, and she burst into tears as she regarded the terrible thing on her pretty head.

Then she sat down, took her chin in her hand, sniffed thoughtfully and began to reason.

Ollie was out of work—true enough. They were without an income—that was a fact. But there were other things to consider. That visit to the Wellingtons' was the important thing. Her husband must make an impression on the promoter. But how could he hope to do so tagged by a wife in a frowzy hat? Her appearance might have everything to do with Ollie's opportunity. Could she afford to place his chances in jeopardy?

She could not.

She left the apartment like a shot out of a rifle, taking along the market bag as she went, for Ollie might be home to lunch and she had nothing in the icebox. Her marketing consumed less than three minutes—a minute for the soup meat, a minute for the carrots, a minute to pay and depart on the more consequential aspect of her journey.

She came soon enough to the most exclusive millinery shop in town. It was presided over by Mme. Selma, the lady with the expressive shoulders. A plain velvet headpiece was finally decided upon for two sensible reasons: it was becoming to Vie's type of beauty and it was the cheapest article bearing Selma's trade-mark. The price was fifteen dollars.

"It ees positeevly scandalous to sell him for so leetle monies," Mme. Selma complained impatiently; "but I am in zee great haste to keep my appointment with zat handsome *coiffeur*, so I sacrifice him."

Vie was in haste, too. She got home as swiftly as a street car would take her there. Tossing the market bag on the kitchen table she gave her immediate attention to the

## WITH A WINK.

contents of the big, round, gold-and-blue striped box which she had placed carefully on the lounge.

Taking the velvet form as a foundation she twisted it and patted it and smoothed it until she got it to her liking. Then, delving into a dresser drawer, she drew forth two magnificent ostrich plumes. These were not ordinary plumes. One was white, the other black, and any woman would have been proud to own them. They had come as a birthday present from her brother Douglas, who worked on an ostrich farm in California. Her husband was ignorant of her possession of them. She had kept them a secret to flash on him in just such a situation as the present one.

She worked swiftly, surely, artistically and the result was as a chrysalis blossoming into a dazzling butterfly.

Vie was elated. An experienced designer would have envied such a creation. Adjusting it to her snow-white brow she observed the effect and smiled. What a difference a becoming hat made in a woman's appearance! How Mrs. Wellington's eyes would water! In its way, the feathered prize was as fine an achievement as a new car, a new maid, a new house or a new husband. To be ineclegant but expressive, it was a knock-out!

Vie put the newly trimmed hat back in its box and pushed the box under the end of her bed.

Then came a diversion. The scare flew through the neighborhood on the lips of a small boy eager to be the first to tell the news.

"Mrs. Jellico's house's been robbed of all its silverware!" he shouted lustily, as windows were flung open and heads thrust out along the street. Nor did he pause with details. He made a Paul Revere dash of it.

As Mrs. Jellico lived but a block away, and as Vie was thoroughly feminine, she lost no time bolting up her apartment and then bolting out of it to learn more of the sensation that had so suddenly disturbed the quiet of the vicinity.

Consequently when Oliver Steele came in shortly afterward, tired, hungry and disappointed and found his wife absent, his view of life was hardly sweetened. He went

through to the kitchen, poked his nose into the market bag and discovered the bit of soup meat and the lone vegetable. Carrots! Ugh! He hated 'em.

He paced back into the living room, looked at his watch, wondered where Vie was, and finally strode into her room looking for a clew. He found more than that. He found the great big gold-and-blue striped box under the end of the bed—the box bearing the name of Mme. Selma with a flourish.

There was an appearance of newness about that box that was disturbing. He drew it forth, untied its ribbons and lifted its lid. With a shaking hand he scooped up the beplumed contents and held them off at arm's length. Never had he seen anything so artistic, but he was not thinking of the hat's beauty. From the gorgeous thing in his hand to the market bag on the kitchen table his glances traveled like the hand of an assassin. Small wonder that the good housewife was able to provide only soup meat and carrots for the stomach when she invested in such a disastrous thing for the head! And his bank balance down to three figures!

Oliver came to a brutal decision. He put the millinery confection back in its bed of tissue paper, replaced the gold lid, tied the lavender ribbons in a hard knot, tied himself out the back way, boarded a street car and reached the shop of Mme. Selma without incident.

The *madame* had gone to the *matinée*, but a large-eyed flapper in French heels greeted him with a smile. "Can I do anything for you?" she asked engagingly.

"You can," replied Steele firmly. "I wish to return this hat."

The flapper's expression changed. She opened the box and pulled forth the velvet creation, shook it violently, turned it over, glanced inside and then rested a puzzled stare on Oliver.

"I don't recognize it," she said, tightening her thin brows, "but it must be ours, as it bears our label. Looks like a velvet form we had in stock, but the *madame* must have trimmed it while your wife waited. I wasn't here myself."

Oliver was wondering how much his wife

had been trimmed while she waited, but put the question in different words. The girl consulted the books, but could find no record. "Evidently Mme. Selma was in a hurry; but I should value the hat in the neighborhood of one hundred dollars."

Oliver hastened to the door for air, mumbling something about Mrs. Steele being in later to adjust the matter.

Meanwhile Vie had been having a perfectly lovely time at Mrs. Jellico's—had some tea and heard all the details of the disappearance of the silverware while Mrs. Jellico, who resembled a ripe fig, was at the beach. She brought the rotund little woman back to the apartment to show off her own handiwork. And to the horror of both the big gold-and-blue box was gone!

"Another robbery!"

A frantic search of the premises by Vie while Mrs. Jellico, who had just gone through a similar experience, stood tapping the floor with her foot. She knew precisely what to do when Mrs. Steele would ask her advice. This Vie did finally.

"Call the police, of course," said Mrs. Jellico, "but it isn't likely to do any good. They never get anything back once its taken."

The station was appealed to, nevertheless, and responded promptly by sending two detectives, who examined window sills, door jambs; looked suspiciously at Mrs. Jellico, because she happened to be a figure in two cases of thievery in one day; and finally began to ask questions. First they demanded a minute description of the missing article, and Vie gave it to them as only she was able to do. They they came to the valuation.

Vie put the value up as one generally does when one loses anything and expects some one else to pay for it. "At least a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty-five dollars," she replied, exchanging a look with Mrs. Jellico, who puckered her lips in eloquent comprehension.

In such subtleties women stand together instinctively.

The detectives said they would concentrate on the case and left the premises, but once outside they agreed that any woman who could afford to spend a hundred bucks for a hat could afford to have it stolen.

When Oliver got back from the milliner's he was a little fearful of what he had done. He let himself into the apartment without much ostentation. It was a desperate risk to seize a bull by the horns and try to escape injury, and that is precisely what he felt he had done. It remained to be seen whether he could finish the operation triumphantly or be rolled in the dust of defeat and humiliation.

Vie, on her part, trembled, too, when she heard the footfall of her liege lord. To buy a new hat was cause enough for a domestic difference of opinion, but to lose it immediately thereafter precipitated a situation that must be handled with the greatest care.

But Oliver gave her no opportunity to open the subject. "Well, my dear," he began peremptorily, "what was the general idea in purchasing a hat fit for a millionaire when I am without an income?"

Vie had risen to greet him. Now she sat down again, abruptly. He knew!

"I was so sore at sight of it that I carried it back to Mme. Selma's without delay. You can go down to-morrow and get your money back."

He was secretly amazed at his own forcefulness.

Mrs. Steele was on her feet. "You—you—took the hat back! Then it wasn't stolen at all?"

"Stolen! Whatever are you talking about?"

She fanned herself a moment while struggling to adjust herself to this latest development. Then she told him of the detectives and the cause of their visit. But he was not concerned with the supposed theft.

"What mental aberration inspired you to invest a hundred dollars in a hat in our present circumstances?" he demanded with some heat. "At a time when we are living on one vegetable—"

"A hundred?" interrupted Vie. "Why, I paid only fifteen dollars for it, you simpleton! Those were my own plumes."

"What?"

"Sure! Douglas sent them to me from California. He's on an ostrich farm now. I was keeping them for a surprise. You made a fine mess of things by your hastiness. We must rush right down to Mme

Selma's before she closes. She's liable to sell the hat—"

"We?" interjected Ollie, eager to be out of the problem. "There's no use our both going. You go and get the hat back and blame it all on me, Vie. I won't mind."

With her lips losing some of their curves Mrs. Steele again boarded the street car at the foot of the street and went back to the milliner's as fast as she could. And there she received the worst shock of the day. The beautifully trimmed hat had been sold by the flapper fifteen minutes after Mr. Steele had returned it.

Mme. Selma had also returned from the matinee. She listened to Vie's explanation in amazement. But she coldly refused to divulge the name of the purchaser. Why should she jeopardize her business? Certainly she was not responsible for the mistakes of others. She was willing to adjust the matter in the only way it could be adjusted. She would refund the price Vie had paid plus a fair valuation for the plumes. The total sum would amount to fifty dollars, she figured, and Vie had to be satisfied with that.

On the homeward journey she grew madder with every turn of the street car wheel. All the joy had gone out of life. With that hat on her head she could have sailed into the Wellington reception hall holding her nose high; but in her last year's turban she would feel a frump.

She found Oliver, with an apron tied across his chest, seated in her best living room chair. He was peeling the carrots.

"I could scream!" was her opening speech. "To think that you should do such a thing! And after me going to all that trouble on your account, too!"

"On my account, dear?"

"On your account, yes! I wanted to impress the Wellingtons. We're going there for dinner."

"We are?" He was astonished. "Then why am I peeling these carrots?"

"How do I know?" she snapped. "Probably because you always do the wrong thing. Carrots aren't peeled—they're scraped!"

"Oh, well," was the only safe thing he could think to reply. Then, after a pro-

longed lull in the conversation, he ventured: "Did you adjust matters?"

She sniffed disparagingly. "I adjusted matters, yes. I got fifty dollars, but I'd rather have the hat!"

She burst into tears.

Oliver sat up suddenly. "You got fifty dollars?" he repeated wonderingly. "Why, that means that those feathers were worth about seventeen and a half dollars each, doesn't it?"

"They were worth more than that, but that's all I could get."

"Say!" he exclaimed excitedly. "That gives me a great idea, Vie! If ostrich plumes bring that much why wouldn't it be a good scheme to get an interest in an ostrich farm?"

"An ostrich farm?" She stared at him. "Why, that's what Douglas wrote me about. He sent the plumes on as samples and said if he had five thousand dollars he could turn over a good proposition in California."

"For Heaven's sake, my dear, why didn't you tell me?"

"Where could we get five thousand dollars?" she demanded shortly.

"I could raise it quickly enough for the right proposition. By George, I believe this ostrich farm is the ticket! I'll get Wellington interested. He goes in for such things. Why, sweetheart, perhaps my blundering may prove fortunate for us, after all. If he will back me we'll go out and join Douglas on the first train. So put on your old bonnet and let's get started."

The Wellington motor called and conveyed them to the Wellington mansion—one of those houses that glowed. One suspected that Samuel Wellington must own a lot of electric light stock. A maid opened the door and admitted them to the reception hall—then disappeared. It was all very elegant.

Both the host and hostess came forward to greet them. Mrs. Wellington was one of those large women who wished to reduce, but couldn't find the time or the necessary amount of inclination. Her husband, whom she called Sam, was much smaller and bald-headed.

Vie was swept upstairs by the hostess,

who seemed very anxious to show her something of extraordinary interest to the feminine heart. The promoter led Oliver to the dining room and mixed a cocktail just as he liked it and as he was positive every one else must like it.

As Oliver had not eaten anything since his meager breakfast of the singular egg, the stimulant got to him rather swiftly and he had a vague impression that he was talking with unusual volubility.

The promoter listened. Listening to great ideas and squashing them was his mission in life. When the ambitious applicant for his favor ran out of wind, Samuel Wellington generally opened up with his pet phrase: "You're wrong, and I'll tell you why." He got it ready now when he imagined that the young man before him was reaching the end of his argument in favor of ostriches and ostrich plumes as a paying proposition.

Mr. Wellington put down his cocktail glass slowly. He looked sympathetically at Oliver. "You're wrong, and I'll show you why, young man." Ollie receded a pace. Samuel continued: "Ostrich plumes are not as valuable as they once were. They can be bought to-day for a song. Why, only this afternoon my wife bought a hat trimmed with two fine feathers—"

"You say your wife bought a hat?" Oliver couldn't keep the exclamation in.

"Yes—a hat trimmed with ostrich plumes eighteen inches long. Looks like a million dollars, but she paid only twenty for it. So you see that smashes your proposition to smithereens."

"It does, indeed," murmured Oliver with misgivings. That is, if it happened to be the same hat that he had taken back. But it couldn't be at that price. The flapper had distinctly told him it was worth a hundred at least. And yet, the circumstances fitted so perfectly into his experiences and those of his wife, that the conviction was overwhelming.

The ladies entered the dining room. There was a queer expression on Vie's face, as though she had bitten into a green persimmon and was trying to make light of it. She looked cautiously at Oliver, and he fancied he read aright the message in her eyes.

As Mrs. Wellington had occasion to speak to the housekeeper before sitting down and as her husband wished to bring forth a bottle of wine from the bin, to which he alone had a key, the guests were left alone for a moment.

"Mrs. Wellington bought a hat," whispered Oliver.

"I saw it," Vie whispered in return. "It's the same."

"But she paid only twenty dollars—"

"Fiddlesticks! That's what she told her husband. She put up a round hundred."

Ollie looked helplessly at Vie. The diplomatic fib of Mrs. Wellington had proved the monkey wrench in the machinery of the ostrich proposition. But what was to be done? Certainly the hostess could not be exposed; and yet, if her unfortunate misrepresentation were permitted to stand it meant *finis* to Steele's opportunity.

The dinner was rather one-sided. That is, the enthusiasm or the sparkle or the *verve* supposed to attend such an affair seemed to spring from the conversation of the host and hostess rather than from the party as a whole. The guests appeared to be absent-minded and listless, although they nodded their heads and smiled and uttered monosyllables when they thought such verbal bursts opportune.

And finally the time of night arrived when Vie "guessed" they must be going. The customary pressure to remain was applied, but not too emphatically, and when it was quite evident that Mr. and Mrs. Steele were sincere in their desire to be off, Mrs. Wellington sent for the car.

"Sam and I will ride home with you," said the hostess without consulting her husband, who was quite ready to call it an evening. And she again swept Vie upstairs to don their hats. When they came down Oliver saw that Mrs. Wellington wore the ostrich-plumed headpiece and he groaned inwardly, having long since given up hope that he could ever convince the promoter of the value of ostrich feathers and still keep secret the wife's deception.

They reached the Steele apartment and were bidding each other good night for the tenth time, when two men stepped out from the shadows of trees and approached rap-

idly. As they came under the glare of an electric light Vie recognized them.

"The detectives!" she exclaimed.

"Just a moment, please," said the taller of the two, revealing his badge.

"What's the idea?" demanded Wellington sharply.

"We want an explanation," returned the plainclothes man. "This lady, Mrs. Steele, called us in to-day to report the loss of a hat—"

"It doesn't matter," interrupted Vie. "I've adjusted the matter satisfactorily."

"Oh, you have?" This rather sarcastically. "Well, if you will tell us how, we will be able to make out our reports accordingly. You claimed the hat was stolen. You gave us a minute description of it. And now, unless my eyes are no good, the lady in the car has the stolen hat on her head."

"What?"

Mrs. Wellington all but burst with astonished indignation. The explosion left her too breathless to continue immediately. But her husband had his wind. Removing his cigar, he exclaimed: "Where do you get that stuff? What's the matter with you fellows, anyway?"

"Nothing the matter with us," answered the detective shortly. "But there's something the matter with this neighborhood. Two thefts on this same street have been reported to-day. Mrs. Jellico claimed she lost her silverware, but it has since been learned that her husband took it out to be replated. Then a hat was taken from Mrs. Steele's apartment, so we decided to hang around. Now the hat shows up on some one who is talking quite sociably with the one who claims she lost it—"

"It was a mistake," struck in Vie. "My hat wasn't stolen at all. I just thought it was." She tried to use her best smile, but it wasn't very effective so far as the law was concerned.

"Wasn't stolen, eh?" repeated the detective suspiciously. "Well, then, in that case suppose you go in and bring it out just to clear up something that's in my mind."

Vie gulped. She wondered why some one did not come to her aid. "I can't bring it out," she floundered.

"Why not?"

"Be-cause it was returned to the shop where I had purchased it."

"Oh, is that so? And what shop was that, if you don't mind?"

"Mme. Selma's," said Vie in a weak voice.

The detective turned and fastened his eyes on Mrs. Wellington. "Where did you buy that hat, madam?"

"I bought it at Mme. Selma's, and I'd like to know whose business it is but my own!"

"What did you pay for it?" pursued the officer of the law.

"That's none of your—"

"Tut, tut," interrupted Mr. Wellington. "There's no need getting bitter over this little misunderstanding. My wife paid twenty dollars for the hat. There's no secret about it."

Like a flash the detective turned on Vie.

"Isn't this the same hat you said was stolen? Answer me! The penalty for giving false information to an officer is a severe one."

"Yes, it looks very much like the same hat," she was forced to admit. "But, of course—"

"And you said the hat you lost was worth a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty-five dollars. Did you or did you not give a false valuation, madam?"

"Don't you answer him," exclaimed Mrs. Wellington. "If he persists in asking foolish questions, he can do so through my lawyer."

"I don't think you have any right to brow-beat my wife," said Oliver hotly.

"I'm not brow-beating anybody," returned the detective. "I'm only trying to get the dope straight for my report. But if that woman sitting in the car says she paid only twenty dollars for that hat—"

"Samuel!" screamed Mrs. Wellington.

"Will you sit there and listen to this common policeman without a uniform to his back insult me? If there was an officer around I'd have him arrested. Drive us home, James, and if this smart Aleck wants any more information let him go and consult with our lawyers."

The car whirled away, the detectives laughed, and Vie and Oliver went into the elevator to their apartment.

Vie was like a rag. She had never felt so thoroughly depressed. The big opportunity was gone and with it the friendship of Mrs. Wellington, no doubt. But Oliver was not as downcast as he should have been. He even smiled once or twice as he prepared for bed. She could not understand him. She started to ply him with questions, but he hushed her up with a kiss.

"Go to sleep and let the future take care of itself."

The following afternoon, while Vie was writing a letter of thanks to her brother Douglas for the plumes and trying to tell him something of the tragedy they had caused, Oliver came home, his face wreathed in smiles. She stared blankly at his beaming face.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded.

"It's all right, old scout," he exclaimed, seizing her arms and crushing her with a caress. "It's quite all right. What are you doing—writing to Doug? That's good. Just slip this draft for five thousand dollars in the letter and tell him we'll be out within two weeks to help him take a whack at the ostrich business."

"Oliver Steele! Where did you get that money?"

"From Wellington, of course."

"What? You told him his wife had fibbed?"

"I did not. Think I'm not more of a diplomat than that? The detective spilled the beans, didn't he?"

"He at least uncovered them; but how did you know that Mr. Wellington caught on?"

Oliver smiled wisely. "My dear, it takes but a glance between you women to understand each other, does it not? Well, it takes a wink between men." He paused to let this truth be fully absorbed. "When the detective blurted out his opinion of the value of the hat, I looked at Wellington. The truth came to him in a flash. He stuck his tongue in his cheek and slipped me a wink of comprehension. This morning I called on him. He handed me a lot of salve for my gallantry in keeping mum to save his wife's reputation for honesty in the face of certain disaster to my scheme. Made a hit with him. Gave me a check, which I converted into a draft to your brother. That's all there is—there isn't any more."

Vie was not completely satisfied. "Do you think he will go for her for fibbing about the price?"

"Women," Oliver said carefully, "may have robbed men of all their rights, but men are still wise enough not to try to rob the ladies of all of theirs."

Taking her in his arms, he smothered her attempt to have the last word with a kiss.

## WEeping LOSES MEN, THEY SAY

I ALWAYS laughed, pretending

I did not care.

And now our love is ending.

I laugh still, lest you know

I grieve to see it go.

Weeping loses men, they say.

But I advise, "Be not too gay."

Mary Carolyn Davies.



# The Fire People

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Golden Atom," etc.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE NEW RULER.

THE solemn bell continued pealing out its knell; the shouts and tumult outside were growing louder. Miela spoke hurriedly to the old man, then turned to leave the room.

"Your commands shall be obeyed, my husband," she said quietly.

I felt again that sudden sense of helplessness as I saw her leave.

"Be careful, Miela. Order every one in the castle to the roof. Here! Tell the queen before you go. Send every one up there with me. The mob may come in. We'll make our stand up there."

I understood Baar's plot better now. He had gathered his mob of peons to surround the castle and make a demonstration in his

favor. Then, with the king dead and the queen and her little son held by him and his men—their lives as forfeits—he hoped to be able to treat with the men of science who controlled the light-ray, and who, I did not doubt, represented the better element among the people.

It seemed a mad plan at best; and now that it had gone wrong, I wondered what Baar would attempt to do. Evidently he and his henchmen had all left the castle, fearing the light-ray, which Miela pretended I held. They were outside now, among the mob, I assumed. Would the mob attempt to enter?

Miela hurried away to send every one inside the building to its roof. The queen, following Miela's commands unquestioningly, took the little prince by the hand and, signing to me to follow, led me upstairs.

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 21.*

There was only one stairway leading to the roof, I found with satisfaction, and it was narrow—an excellent place for defense. The roof was broad and flat, flanked at the ends by two towers which rose considerably above it.

It was a frightened little group who gathered about me—the queen and her son, two of the king's councilors, and perhaps half a dozen young girls whom I took to be the queen's attendants. Others came up each moment.

I sat the queen down on a little white stone bench in the center of the garden, and bowed before her respectfully. Then I smiled upon them all. I think they were reassured and trusted me, and I found my commands were obeyed without question.

The queen was a woman of perhaps thirty-five—tall and slender, with black hair and eyes. She was dressed in a single garment of heavy white silk, a dress that fell ungathered at the waist from above her breast under the arms to her ankles. It was, I judged, her sleeping robe. Her hair hung in two long braids over her shoulders; her feet were incased in sandals.

She was unquestionably a beautiful woman. I remember my vague surprise, as I saw her, with her son by her side, and her long sleek wings unmutilated. And then I saw that her wings were fastened together in two places by little metal chains. She, then, like other married women, was not permitted to fly, although the beauty of her wings was unspoiled.

I sent two of the old men to stand by the head of the stairs. Miela had given me her knife, and I handed it now to one of them, trying to make him understand that he was to bar the passage of any one who should not be allowed up. He shuddered, but he took the knife and stood where I indicated.

The crowd in the garden below had seen us on the roof now, and the tumult of shouts was doubled. I went to the parapet and looked over.

The garden was full of a struggling, confused mass of people. Those nearest the castle were mostly peons. I noticed men and a few women armed with various implements of agriculture, and any sort of

rude weapon they could obtain. They were standing about in little groups or rushing excitedly to and fro in aimless, uncommanded activity.

Many of them held stones in their hands, which occasionally they cast at the building. It was one of those mobs that gather ready for trouble, is swayed in almost any direction by any chance leadership, and most frequently accomplishes nothing.

I felt a sudden sense of relief. The garden was rapidly filling up with men and women of the more intelligent classes, who mingled with the others, learned what had occurred—for I did not doubt but that the knowledge of the king's death had spread about—and then stood waiting to see what would happen.

The air was full of excited girls flying over the castle. A few alighted for a moment on the roof, but I did not fear them. Where was Baar? I could not hope to distinguish him among the crowd, but still I saw no sign of his leadership. Had he seen the failure of his plan and, fearing the results of his regicide, fled the vicinity? I hoped so fervently.

As I showed myself at the parapet a great shout arose. Some of the men—I knew at once it was those who had heard I possessed the light-ray—scattered in terror at my appearance. I determined then, if no issue were raised that would demand my using this supposed weapon, I could continue to command the situation.

I stood there a moment looking down. At the edge of the crowd I saw a few figures whom I took to be members of the city's police. They were standing idle, taking no part in what was going on. There seemed nothing I could do until Miela returned. If only I could speak to the crowd! I wondered if I dared descend among them and disperse the mob of peons. I went to the head of the stairway. Three or four of the king's councilors were standing there.

There was no one on the stairs; evidently every one living in the castle was now on its roof—some thirty of them altogether. The crowd outside quite evidently had no present intention of entering the building. The mob of peons Baar had gathered were

greatly in the minority now, and I felt that matters were steadily improving. I wondered where Miela was, and then while I was standing there I saw her coming up the stairs, a man following close behind her.

I think I have never been so glad to see any one as I was to see her at this moment. Her face was grave; her demeanor calm, as before.

"He is here," she said as she came to the head of the stairs. "This is Fuero, Alan, leader of the men of science, who have the ray."

As he came out onto the roof I saw this man was easily the most dominant personality I had so far encountered on Mercury. He was tall for his race, although several inches shorter than I, a man of sixty, perhaps, with iron-gray hair falling long about his ears.

He wore sandals and a pair of the usual knee-length, wide-cut trousers. But what distinguished him in his dress was a broad panel of heavy silk, hanging from neck to knee, both in back and front, with an opening at the top through which his head was thrust. This silken panel was some eighteen inches wide, light gray in color, and richly embroidered in gold in various designs. It hung free, except for a slight fastening at the waist line. Beneath it the man's naked torso—and his bare arms—showed powerfully muscled.

His face was smooth shaven, with strong, regular features. I noticed, too, there was a slight cleft in his square chin. His forehead was high, his blue eyes kindly, yet with a searching, piercing quality about them.

It was not so much the man's general appearance as his bearing that made me realize he was a forceful character. There was about him unmistakable poise. I knew at once he felt his power, his authority. That he would use it wisely I could not doubt.

He stood regarding me gravely—an appraising regard under which I felt myself flushing a little. Miela spoke to him swiftly, and he inclined his head to me by way of introduction, his glance meanwhile taking in the scene on the roof.

With Miela as interpreter we held a hur-

ried conversation. I learned then that Fuero and his associates had many years before organized a society for the development of the light-ray in its various forms. They had soon realized in their experiments its diabolical power of destruction, and had taken oath then that they would not use it, or allow it to be used, except under the most critical circumstances of the nation's welfare.

Realizing, too, the power it gave them as individuals, they had sworn to remain men of science only, taking no part in public affairs, remaining rigidly aloof from all national affairs. Most of their work concerned the development of the light-ray for industrial purposes. In these forms it developed heat, but had very little power of projection.

All this Miela told me in a few brief sentences.

"How did Tao get the ray?" I demanded.

"Some members of the society proved false," she answered. "When Tao was banished to the Twilight Country they deserted their brothers and joined him. There were others with him of scientific mind, and these soon learned how to make it, too."

Fuero was still regarding me appraisingly. I felt suddenly very young, very inadequate as I stood there facing him. But I met his gaze squarely, and all at once he smiled.

"He says, 'Let us speak to the people,'" said Miela.

We went to the parapet. Only a few moments had elapsed since I had stood there before. The situation below was unchanged, except that the crowd had grown denser.

A sudden hush fell as they saw us. Fuero turned to me and spoke quietly, his eyes seemed searching out my thoughts.

"He asks you, my husband, if you will take oath before your God to do what is right for our people. He wishes to trust you now in this crisis, for there is no one else, and he believes in you."

"I will, Miela," I said solemnly. "Before God I swear it."

The man gazed steadily into my eyes another instant, then abruptly he thrust a

small metal cylinder into my hand. I thrilled as my fingers closed around it. He seemed to hesitate, then he turned and, slowly crossing the rooftop, looking neither to right nor left, he descended the stairs out of our sight.

He had done what he thought was best, and, having done it, had withdrawn immediately from further participation in the affair.

It may have been the absence of his dominant personality, or the grasp of my hand about this little metal cylinder, but now I felt a renewed sense of responsibility, and with it a feeling of power that swept aside all doubts and all fears. Now I could command, could guide and control, the destiny of this nation, and could, thank God, save my own world.

"Miela," I said, "tell the queen her son shall be king. I am about to proclaim him king before the people, and I, as regent, will rule. Tell her that, and bring him here now to me."

The queen made no answer, save a slight inclination of her head. But I saw that she had recovered composure. She pushed her son gently away from her, and I strode forward to meet him.

"Tell him, Miela, he is a man now, and must have no fear, for he is the greatest man in all this land."

I patted his shoulder as he stood beside me, and he looked up into my face and smiled bravely.

The top of the parapet was flat and broad. I raised the little boy up and stood him upon it. Instantly another tumult of shouts arose.

I looked down and saw the figure of Fuero as he stalked unheeding across the garden, the people respectfully opening up a path before his advance.

Approval and derision seemed mingled in the cries that greeted the appearance of the little prince.

"Quiet them if you can, Miela," I said. "Speak to them."

I steadied the boy with my hand, and he stood there unafraid, a sturdy, manly little figure.

Miela raised her voice and began speaking. The shouts partially ceased, then sud-

denly a stone struck the parapet almost in front of us.

A sudden rage possessed me. I fumbled at the cylinder I held. It was very much like a little hand flashlight, and seemed to have a knob at my thumb. Miela stopped speaking and turned to me.

"There—press that, Alan. Careful! Aim it there! See! Over there against those palms."

I held the thing up and pointed it toward the huge royal palms, aiming at their graceful fronds high over the heads of the people. My hand pressed the knob; the little cylinder seemed to thrill in my grasp. A tiny beam of light shot out—quite plainly visible—a green, shading into red. It struck the palm branches, and silently yet rapidly, as though they were under some giant blow-torch, they shriveled, crackled, and burst into flame.

Miela's fingers bit into my arm.

"Enough, Alan! Stop!"

My thumb yielded to the upward pressure of the tiny knob against it, and abruptly the light vanished. A narrow swath had been cut through the palms—a furrow of death plowed by the pressure of my thumb against a bit of metal!

The crowd had frozen into the immobility of terror. Now, as the dreaded ray vanished as suddenly as it had sprung forth, they turned with cries of fright to escape. No one had been hurt. I shuddered as I realized now that many girls had been in the air, and through no thought or skill of mine had they escaped.

"Speak to them, Alan," Miela cried. "There must be no panic. Here must they stay and listen to what you have to say. Speak to them; stop them now."

I handed her the cylinder, lest the diabolical thing spit forth again its fire from my unskillful fingers, and leaped to the top of the parapet.

"Stop!" I shouted at the top of my voice. "Stop—all of you! At once!"

I waved my arms violently. I knew my words meant nothing, but my voice carried far. The excitement continued. But a few stopped and stared at me; then others, and gradually there was less confusion.

Miela turned and shouted something to

the girls on the rooftop. Instantly they spread their wings and flew down, circling close over the heads of the people.

"Wait, Alan. A moment now and there will be quiet. The girls are telling them not to fear, but to wait and listen to what you have to say."

Miela stood now upon the parapet top, with the little prince between us. She had concealed the tiny metal cylinder in her belt; her open palms were flung out before her, and her wings, spread and flapping slowly, raised her on tiptoe. Every line of her graceful body was tense; her attitude bespoke power, dominance, authority. And then she began to talk in a voice vibrant with emotion. Once she laid her hand lightly upon the curly head of the little boy, and a tremulous, uncertain cheer answered her from below.

"I have told them of the king's death, Alan," she said a moment later, "and that here is their little king standing before them. And now, of you—what shall I say?"

"Tell them that until the king is older, I—the man from earth—shall rule them as regent. Tell them if they obey me all will be well, for I shall rule them wisely."

I stood while Miela translated this amid dead silence from the crowd. As she finished I raised myself to full height and stared down at them threateningly.

"But if there is trouble—if any one defies my authority—then, Miela, tell them I shall use the light-ray, for I shall brook no interference."

The silence from below continued.

I spread my hands out before me and smiled.

"But there will be no trouble. I am with the Light Country, heart and soul. Its interests are my interests, for I have married one of its women, and now I too am one of its people.

"Tao shall be overthrown—tell them that, Miela. The Twilight People never again shall threaten our cities. If more land is wanted by our people of the Light Country, tell them they shall have it. All the land they desire shall be theirs. For when Tao is vanquished I shall build great wars such as he is building, and all who wish

may go to my earth peacefully, and we will make them welcome as I have been made welcome here."

A cheer arose as Miela translated this; and now for the first time I heard no cries of dissent.

"Say to them again I shall rule them wisely. Say I shall look to them—all of them, rich and poor alike—for help in what we have to do. All must help me, for I am only one, and I need them all. When this work we have to do is over, when our nation is freed forever from this menace from across the sea, tell them that then I will give my every thought to the details of their welfare. All that they wish—if it lays in my power—shall be done."

A girl alighted for an instant on the parapet near me; another darted downward in her flight, evidently to avoid the disrespect of passing directly in front of me. The thought flashed through my mind that I might mention the virgins and promise them reversal of the law they so abhorred, but I felt it would be impolitic to raise that question at such a time as this.

"Tell them now to leave the grounds quietly," I concluded. "When I wish them again they will be sent for. All that I do will be known through public proclamation."

I lifted the little prince in my arms, and then, with the cheers of the people ringing in my ears, jumped backward with him to the roof below.

Thus, by swift moving circumstances which could not have been foreseen, was I made ruler of the Light Country. The crowd dispersed quietly. We sent the queen and her waiting maids back to her apartments, the aged councilors to theirs, and soon Miela and I were alone in one of the castle rooms.

Now that the nervous excitement under which I had been laboring was over, I felt utterly exhausted. I dropped wearily into a seat, and Miela sat on the floor at my feet with her arms on my knees.

I stroked her glossy black hair idly.

"I'm tired, girl. I'm all in. Aren't you?"

We had not slept since the afternoon before, and so much had happened since.

Suddenly I remembered Lua.

"Miela—your mother. We must find her." I started to my feet, then sat down again.

There was no use of my rushing away on some aimless search over a city like this.

"Where is the head of the city's police, Miela?"

"I have sent for him. He should be here now to see you."

"I must have him search the city. Lua must be found. The castle guards—we must appoint others, Miela. I must have a council, too—not doddering old men, but others that we shall select. Who collects the taxes? Where is the money? Who handles it?"

The questions piled upon me faster than I could voice them, and all the while my tired brain and weary, aching body called only for rest—for sleep.

I thought of Mercer and Anina. They should be back by now.

"We must send home and have them told we are here, Miela. And that slave woman of Baar's—she will be there, too. She must be sent here to us also."

We had decided to live in the castle.

"When Mercer and Anina return we must arrange to go to the Water City. The disturbance there must be quelled. All the cities must be told of our actions here. I must visit them all, Miela."

My voice seemed trailing off as though I were talking to myself. A thousand problems rushed in confusion through my mind. I felt I was talking almost incoherently. A knock on the door of our room brought me to myself.

A young girl stood respectfully on the threshold. Miela listened to what she had to say, questioned her swiftly, and then turned to me. Her face had gone suddenly white.

"The girls have returned from over the sea, Alan. This is one of them. But Anina and our friend Ollie have stayed there."

"Stayed there?" I cried. "Why?"

"They set free Tao's men as we planned. They were on their way back when the earth-man suddenly bid Anina return. Something was wrong, he said. This girl does not understand what. But they went

back. And Anina and Ollie they left there, standing on the shore together. We are to go over to the same place to-night, if we can, and get them. That is all the girl knows."

The girl withdrew after a moment.

Mercer and Anina left in the Twilight Country! Miela and I stared at each other blankly.

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN THE TWILIGHT COUNTRY.

MERCER sat on the rear end of the platform and waved good-by vigorously as he was carried swiftly up and out over the water. Under him was a pile of blankets and a coat, and beside him a box of baked dough like bread—the food he was to turn over to Tao's emissaries when he set them free.

Anina flew at his side, at intervals smiling up at him reassuringly. Before him on the platform his captives huddled. Although all of them were trussed up securely, he menacingly kept his little wooden revolver pointed at them from the level of his knee.

He chuckled as he thought of the fight at the bayou. Everything was working out all right; it was surprising what one could do with his physical strength here on Mercury.

The girls had carried the platform up some five hundred feet above the sea. Mercer turned and looked back. The shore had already dropped almost to the rim of the close-encircling horizon. He leaned over toward Anina, resting one hand on the bamboo handle she was holding. "How long will it take us to get there, Anina?"

He knew the girl would understand his words, but he did not realize she had little basis for comparing time in his language.

"Long time," she answered, smiling. "But we go quickly now."

He sat back again and waited. It seemed like hours—it was hours probably, three or four—and still they swept onward straight as an arrow.

After another interminable interval Anina raised one hand and pointed ahead.

"Twilight Country—there," she said.

Mercer saw, coming up over the horizon, the dim outlines of a rocky land sparsely covered with trees. It spread out rapidly before him as he watched, fascinated. It seemed a desolate land, a line of low, barren hills off to one side, and a forest of stunted, naked-looking trees in front. The platform swept on over the shore line, a rocky beach on which the calm sea rolled up in tiny white lines of breakers. Then in a great curve the girls circled to one side.

"Where are we going?" Mercer asked.

"A trail—near us somewhere. A trail to the Lone City. There we land."

Mercer saw the trail in a moment. It came out of the woods and struck the shore by a little bight where boats could land. The girls swooped downward, and in a moment more the platform was lying motionless on the beach.

Mercer looked around. It was light enough to see objects in the immediate foreground—a gray twilight. The forest came almost to the water's edge. He saw now the trees might have been firs, but with small, twisted trunks, few branches except near the top, and very few leaves. They seemed somehow very naked and starved—indeed, it surprised him that they could grow at all in such a rocky waste. The end of the trail was close before him. It appeared merely an opening in the trees with the fallen logs and underbrush cleared away.

The girls were obviously cold, standing idle now after their long flight. Mercer lost no time in preparing for the return journey. He tumbled his captives unceremoniously off the platform and set the box of food and blankets beside them.

"What's this, Anina?"

He was holding in his palm a tiny metal cylinder.

Anina took it from him.

"For fire, see?"

She picked up a bit of driftwood, and, holding the end of the cylinder against it, pressed a little button. A curl of smoke rose from the wood, and in a moment a wisp of flame.

"A light-ray!" Mercer exclaimed.

"The ray—but different."

She tossed the blazing bit of wood aside, and held her hand a foot or so in front of the cylinder.

"No danger! See?" She brought her hand closer. "Heat here—close—no heat far away."

Mercer understood then that this was not a light-ray projector, but a method of producing heat with the property of radiation, but not of projection—a different and harmless form of the ray.

He took the little cylinder from the girl, inspected it curiously, then laid it on the blankets.

"They'll need it, I guess, if it's any colder where they're going."

He set one of the captives free.

"Anina, tell him to sit quiet until we've gone. Then he can cut the others loose." He tossed a knife into the box. "Come on, Anina; let's get away."

They were about ready to start back, when Mercer suddenly decided he was hungry. He hopped off the platform. "They don't need all that food."

He gathered some of the little flat cakes of dough in his hands. "Want some?" He offered them to the girls, who smilingly refused.

"All right. I do. I'm hungry. Might as well take a blanket, too. It's devilish cold."

He was back on the platform in a moment, sitting down with the blanket about his knees and munching contentedly at the bread.

"All right, Anina. Start her off."

They swung up into the air and began the return flight.

A few hours more and they would be back at the Great City. Then the real work would begin. Mercer squared his shoulders unconsciously as he thought of all there was to do.

But there was no danger to the Light Country from Tao, he thought with satisfaction. At least, there would be none when the other cities were rid of Tao's men, as the Great City was now. The men would find their way back all right—

At the sudden thought that came to him Mercer dropped his bit of bread and sat up

in astonishment. Tao no longer a menace? He remembered my reasoning in the boat coming down the bayou. Of course, Tao would have no reason to attack the Light Country by force of arms until he was sure his propaganda among the people had failed.

My argument was sound enough, but the utter stupidity of what we had done now dawned on Mercer with overwhelming force. Tao would await the results of his emissaries' work, of course. And here we had gone and sent them straight back to their leader to report their efforts a failure! If anything were needed to precipitate an invasion from Tao, this very thing Mercer had just finished doing was it. He cursed himself and me fervently as he thought what fools we had been.

Then it occurred to him perhaps it was not too late to repair the damage. Not more than half an hour had passed since he had set the men free on the shore of the Twilight Country. He must go back at once. Under no circumstances must they be allowed to reach Tao and tell him what had occurred.

Anina was flying near Mercer as before. He leaned over the edge of the platform to talk with her, but the wind of their forward flight and the noise of the girls' wings made conversation difficult.

"Anina! Come up here with me. Sit here. I want to talk to you. It's important. They don't need you flying now."

Obediently the girl sat where he indicated, close beside him. And then as he was about to begin telling her what was in his mind Mercer suddenly remembered that they were still heading toward the Light Country, every moment getting farther away from Tao's men, whose homeward journey he must head off some way.

"We must go back, Anina—back where we came from—at once. Tell them—now! Then I'll tell you why."

The girl's eyes widened, but she did as he directed, and the platform, making a broad, sweeping turn, headed back toward the Twilight Country shore.

"Anina, how far is it to Tao's city from where we landed?"

"The Lone City? A day, going fast."

"But they won't go fast, will they? Some of them are pretty badly hurt."

"Two days for them," the girl agreed.

Mercer then told her what an error we had made. She listened quietly, but he knew she understood, not only his words, but the whole situation as he viewed it then.

"Most bad," she said solemnly when he paused.

"That's what I want to tell you; it's bad," he declared. "We've got to head them off some way; stop them somehow. I don't see how we're going to capture them again—ten of them against me. But we've got to do something."

Then he asked her about the lay of the country between the shore of the sea and the Lone City.

Anina's English was put to severe test by her explanation; but she knew far many more words than she had ever used, and now, with the interest of what she had to say, she lost much of the diffidence which before had restrained her.

She told him that the trail led back through the forest for some distance, and then ran parallel with a swift flowing river. This river, she explained, emptied into the Narrow Sea a few miles below the end of the trail. It was the direct water route to the Lone City.

The trail, striking the river bank, followed it up into a mountainous country—a metallic waste where few trees grew. There was a place still farther up in a very wild, broken country, where the river ran through a deep, narrow gorge, and the trail followed a narrow ledge part way up one of its precipitous sides.

Anina's eyes sparkled with eagerness as she told of it.

"There, my friend Ollie, we stop them. Many loose stones there are, and the path is very narrow."

Mercer saw her plan at once. They could bar the men's passage somewhere along this rocky trail, and with stones drive them back. He realized with satisfaction that he could throw a stone fully twice as large and twice as far as any of the men, and thus, out of range, bombard them until they would be glad enough to turn back.

His plan, then, was to land, and with Anina follow the men. The rest of the girls he would send back to me with the platform, to tell Miela and me to come over the next evening to the end of the trail.

He and Anina meanwhile would keep close behind the men, and then when the cañon was neared, get around in front of them and bar their farther advance. This would be easy since he could walk and run much faster than they, and Anina could fly. He would drive them back out of the gorge, send Anina to keep the appointment with me and bring me up to him with the girls and the platform.

They reached the shore and landed within a few feet of where they had been an hour before. The men were not in sight; nothing remained to show they had been there, save pieces of cut cord lying about.

Anina now instructed the girls what to tell me, and in a moment more, with the blanket and a few pieces of bread, she and Mercer were left standing alone on the rocky beach. Anina was cold. He took off his fur jacket and wrapped it about her shoulders.

She made a quaint little picture standing there, with her two long braids of golden hair, and her blue-feathered wings which the jacket only partly covered. They started up the trail together. It was almost dark in the woods, but soon their eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, and they could see a little better. They walked as rapidly as Anina was able, for the men had nearly an hour's start, and Mercer concluded they would be far ahead.

They had gone perhaps a mile, climbing along over fallen logs, walking sometimes on the larger tree trunks lying prone—rude bridges by which the trail crossed some ravine—when Anina said:

"I fly now. You wait here, Ollie, and I find where they are."

She handed him the coat and flew up over the treetops, disappearing almost immediately in the darkness. Mercer slung the coat around him and sat down to wait. He sat there perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes, staring up at the silent, motionless treetops, and thinking all sorts of vague,

impossible dangers impending. Then he heard her wings flapping and saw her flitting down through the trees.

"Very near, they are," she said as soon as she reached the ground. "A fire—they have—and they are ready now to sleep."

They went on slowly along the trail, and soon saw the glimmer of a fire ahead. "A camp for the night," whispered Mercer. "It must be nearly morning now."

He looked about him and smiled as he realized that no light would come with the morning. Always this same dim twilight here—and eternal darkness on ahead. "Good Lord, what a place to live!" he muttered.

They crept on cautiously until they were within sight of the camp. A large fire was burning briskly. Most of the men were wrapped in their blankets, apparently asleep; three were sitting upright, on guard. Mercer and Anina crept away.

"We'd better camp, too," Mercer said when they were well out of hearing. "They will probably stay there four or five hours, anyway. Lord, I'm tired." He laid his hand on her shoulder gently, almost timidly. "Aren't you tired, too, little girl?"

"Yes," she answered simply, and met his eyes with her gentle little smile. "Oh, yes—I tired. Very much."

They did not dare light a fire, nor had they any means of doing so. They went back from the trail a short distance, finding a little recess between two fallen logs, where the ground was soft with a heavy moss. Here they decided to sleep for a few hours.

A small pool of water had collected on a barren surface of rock near by, and from this they drank. Then they sat down together and ate about half the few remaining pieces of bread which Mercer was carrying in the pockets of his jacket. They were both tired out. Anina particularly was very sleepy.

When they had finished eating Anina lay down, and Mercer covered her with the blanket. She smiled up at him.

"Good night, Anina."

"Good night, my friend Ollie."

She closed her eyes, snuggling closer un-

der the blanket with a contented little sigh. Mercer put on his jacket and sat down beside her, his chin cupped in his hand. It seemed colder now. His trousers were thin, his legs felt numb and stiff from his recent exertion.

He sat quiet, staring at the sleeping girl. She was very beautiful and very sweet, lying there with her golden hair framing her face, her little head pillowed on her arms, a portion of one blue-feathered wing peeping out from under the blanket. All at once Mercer bent over and kissed her lightly, brushing her lips with his, as one kisses a sleeping child.

She stirred, then opened her eyes and smiled up at him again.

"You cold, Ollie," she said accusingly. She lifted an edge of the blanket. "Here—you sleep, too."

He stretched himself beside her, and she flung a corner of the blanket over him; and thus, like two children lost in the woods and huddled together for warmth under a fallen log, they slept.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### ANOTHER LIGHT-RAY!

THE news that Mercer and Anina had been left in the Twilight Country completely dumfounded Miela and me. "Something was wrong," Mercer had said. And then they had insisted on staying there, and had sent the girls back to tell me to come over.

We could make nothing of it, nor did the half hour of argument into which we immediately plunged further enlighten us. That flaw in our plans which had dawned on Mercer so suddenly and clearly certainly never occurred to us, for all it was seemingly so obvious.

We were interrupted—having reached no conclusion whatever except that we would go over that evening as Mercer had directed—by the arrival of the police chief to see me. He was a little man, curiously thin and wizened for a Mercutian, with wide pantaloons, a shirt, short jacket and little triangular cocked hat. His face seemed pointed, like a ferret. His move-

ments were rapid, his roving glance peculiarly alert.

He bowed before me obsequiously. He would obey me to the letter, I could see that at once from his manner; though, had I impressed him as being like my predecessor, I did not doubt but that he would do as he pleased upon occasion.

I toyed with the little light-ray cylinder in my hand quite casually through the brief interview, and I saw he was thoroughly impressed, for he seemed unable to take his eyes from it.

"Where are your men just now?" I asked.

He raised his hands deprecatingly and poured out a flood of words to Miela when my question was translated to him.

"He himself was sleeping," she said to me when he had paused for breath. "His third watch was on patrol about the city. Then from the castle came the king's guards, fleeing in haste. Those of the police they met they told that evil men were in the castle with the light-ray, and all who represented the city's authority would be killed."

"That was a lie," I interrupted. "There was no light-ray here then."

Miela nodded. "It was what Baar's men had told them to say, I think."

"And then what happened to the police?"

"Then they left their posts about the city. Some fled; others went back and reported what they had heard."

"And it never occurred to any of them to come up here and try to stop the disturbance? Curious policemen, these!"

"It is too deadly—the light-ray," said Miela. "They were afraid. And then the alarm bell began ringing. They sent for Ano, here, to ask him what they should do. And then you sent for him. He has his men at the police building, in waiting. And he comes to you at the risk of his life, and now asks your commands."

Thus did my chief of police explain satisfactorily to himself, and with great protestations of loyalty to his trust, how it came about that he and his men did nothing while their king was being murdered and another put in his place.

Recriminations seemed useless. He stood bowing and scraping before me, eager only to obey my slightest wish.

"Tell him, Miela, how Baar's men captured Lua. Have the city thoroughly searched—Baar's house particularly. Tell him I killed Baar's wife. Have that slave woman sent home to me.

"Tell him to capture Baar and any of his known associates. If he does, have him report to me at once. Say to him that I must have word of Lua—or I'll have a new chief of police by to-morrow. For the rest, have his men patrol the city as usual."

I spoke as sternly as I could, and the little man received my words with voluble protestations of extreme activity on his part.

When he had bowed himself out I smiled at Lua hopelessly.

"This has got to be a mighty different government before we can ever hope to accomplish anything against Tao." Tao was not worrying me for the moment. Lua must be found, and I had no idea of relying entirely upon this little chief of police to find her. And Mercer needed me, too, this very evening.

I stood up wearily and put my arm about Miela's shoulders. Her little body drooped against mine, her head resting on my shoulder. There was little about us then, as we stood there dispirited and physically tired out, that would have commanded respect from our subjects.

"We *must* get some sleep, Miela," I said. "Things will look very different to us then."

It must have been mid-afternoon when we awoke. Ano was at hand to report that Baar and his men, and all the king's guards, must have fled the city. Of Lua he had, so far, found no trace. Baar's slave woman was in the castle, waiting our commands. The girl who had brought us Mercer's message was also waiting to ask us when we wanted her and the other girls for the trip back to the Twilight Country.

"Right away," I exclaimed. "I'm not going to take any chances with Mercer. We'll start at once."

The girl flew away to get her friends and the platform, which had been left in the garden of Miela's home. I planned to start

openly from the castle roof; there was now no need of maintaining secrecy.

The disappearance of Lua was alarming. Equally so was the possible danger into which Mercer might have blundered. In Lua's case there did not seem much I could do personally at that moment. Before starting I arranged with the aged councilors to call a meeting the following morning of all government officials.

"Could we get Fuero to come, Miela?"

She shook her head positively. "His oath would forbid it."

"Well, tell the councilors to call also any of the city's prominent men. I've got to get some good men with me. I can't do it all alone."

Miela smiled at me quizzically as I said this.

"You have forgotten our women and their help, my husband?"

I had, in very truth, for the moment.

"We'll need them, too," I said. "Tell these girls who carry us to-night to call all those who went with us to the mountains—a meeting to-morrow at this time—here on the castle roof."

"To the Water City we must go," Miela said. "There Tao's men are very strong, our girls report. And to-day there was a fight among the people, and several were killed."

"But we must go armed, Miela, with more than one light-ray. I shall see this Fuero to-morrow. After all, he's the keynote to the whole thing."

We started from the castle roof, Miela sitting with me this time on the platform. Flying low, we passed over the maze of bayous, and in what seemed an incredibly short time we were out over the sea. I had now no idea what we might be called upon to do, or how long we would be gone, for all my specific plans for the next day; so we started as well prepared as possible.

The precious light-ray cylinder I held in my hand. We had a number of blankets, enough food for us all for two days of careful rationing, a knife or two, and a heavy, sharp-edged metal implement like an ax.

It seemed hardly more than half an hour before a great black cloud had spread over the whole sky, and we ran into the worst

storm I have ever encountered. The wind came up suddenly, and we fought our way directly into it. Lightning flashed about us, and then came the rain, slanting down in great sheets.

We were still flying low. The mirror surface of the sea was now lashed with waves, extraordinarily high, whose white tops blew away in long streaks of scud. The girls fought sturdily against the wind and rain, carrying us steadily up until after a while I could not see the water below.

We were in the storm perhaps an hour altogether. Then we passed up and beyond it, and emerged again into that gray vacancy, with a waste of storm-lashed water far beneath us.

The Twilight Country shore was still below the horizon, and it was a considerable time before we sighted it. Miela and I sat quiet, wrapped in a blanket, which, wet as it was, offered some protection against the biting wind. The girls seemed exhausted from their long struggle against the storm, and I was glad for them when we finally landed.

This was the place, they said, where Mercer and Anina had set Tao's men free, and where the two were standing when the girls had left with the platform. I looked about, and saw on the beach the pieces of cut cord with which the men had been bound.

Of Mercer and Anina there was no sign. We waited until well after the time of the evening meal, and still Mercer and Anina did not arrive. We concluded, of course, that they had followed Tao's men up the trail for some reason, and we expected it would be Anina who would come back to tell us where Mercer was.

"Let us go up a little distance," Miela suggested finally. "They cannot tell what the hour is. They may be near here now, coming back."

The girls were rested and warmed now, and we started off again with the platform. We flew low over the treetops, following the trail as best we could, but in the semi-darkness we could see very little from above. After a time we gave it up and returned to the shore.

Again we waited, now very much

alarmed. And then finally we decided to return to the Great City for the night. Anina might have missed us some way, we thought, and flown directly home. She might be there waiting for us when we arrived. If not, we would return again with several hundred girls, and with them scour the country carefully back as near the Lone City as we dared go.

With our hearts heavy with apprehension we started back across the channel. Lua, Mercer and Anina were separated from us. All had been captured, perhaps, by our enemies! Things were, indeed, in a very bad way.

Without unusual incident we sighted the Light Country shore. Three girls were winging their way swiftly toward us.

"They wish to speak with us, Alan," said Miela. "From the Great City they seem to come. Perhaps it is Anina."

Our hopes were soon dispelled, for Anina was not one of them; they were three of the girls we had directed to patrol the seacoast.

When they neared us Miela flew off the platform and joined them. They circled about for a time, flying close together, then Miela left them and returned to me, while they hovered overhead. Her face was clouded with anxiety as she alighted beside me.

"They were near the Water City a short time ago. And they say the light-ray is being used there. They saw it flashing up, and dared not go closer."

The light-ray in the Water City! My heart sunk with dismay. The cylinder I held in my hand I had thought the only one in use in all the Light Country. With it I felt supreme. And now they had it also in the Water City!

One of the girls flung up her hand suddenly and called to Miela.

"See, Alan—a boat!"

I looked down to where Miela pointed. The sea was still rough from the storm, but no longer lashed into fury. Coming toward us, close inshore and from the direction of the Water City, I saw a boat speeding along over the spent waves. And as I looked, a narrow beam of light, green, shading into red, shot up from the boat and

hung wavering in the air like a little search-light striving to pierce the gray mist of the sky'

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE THEFT OF THE LIGHT-RAY.

THE touch of soft, cool hands on his face brought Mercer back to sudden consciousness. He opened his eyes; Anina was sitting beside him, regarding him gravely.

"Wake up, my friend Ollie. Time now to wake up."

He sat up, rubbing his eyes. The same dim twilight obscured everything around. For an instant he was confused.

"Why, I've been asleep." He got to his feet. "Do you think it's been long, Anina? Maybe the men have started off. Let's go see."

Anina had already been to see; she had awakened some little time before and, leaving Mercer asleep, had flown up ahead over the treetops.

The men were just then breaking camp, and she had returned to wake up Mercer. They ate their last remaining pieces of bread, drank from the little pool of water, and were soon ready to start on after their quarry.

"How long will it take them to reach the gorge, Anina?"

"Not very long—four times farther reach Lone City."

By which Mercer inferred that within three or four hours, perhaps, they would be at the place where they hoped to turn the men back.

They started off slowly up the trail, Mercer carrying the folded blanket, and Anina wearing the fur jacket. They soon came upon the smoldering fire that marked the other party's night encampment. The men were, Mercer judged, perhaps a mile or so ahead of them.

They continued on, walking slowly, for they did not want to overtake the slow-traveling men ahead. The look of the country, what they could see of it in the darkness, was unchanged. The trail seemed bending steadily to the right, and after a

time they came to the bank of a river which the trail followed. It was a broad stream, perhaps a quarter of a mile across, with a considerable current sweeping down to the sea.

They kept to the trail along the river bank for nearly another hour. Then Anina abruptly halted, pulling Mercer partly behind a tree trunk.

"Another fire," she whispered. "They stop again."

They could see the glow of the fire, close by the river bank among the trees. Very cautiously they approached and soon made out the vague outlines of a boat moored to the bank. It seemed similar to the one in which they had come down the bayous from the Great City, only slightly larger.

"Other men," whispered Anina. "From Lone City."

Mercer's heart sank. A party from the Lone City—more of Tao's men to join those he had set free! All his fine plans were swept away. The men would all go up to the Lone City now in the boat, of course. There was nothing he could do to stop them. And now Tao would learn of the failure of his plans.

Mercer's first idea was to give up and return to the shore of the sea; but Anina kept on going cautiously forward, and he followed her.

The fire, they could see as they got closer, was built a little back from the water, with a slight rise of ground between it and the boat. There were some thirty men gathered around; they seemed to be cooking.

"You stand here, Ollie," Anina whispered. "I go hear what they say. Stand very quiet and wait. I come back."

Mercer sat down with his back against a tree and waited. Anina disappeared almost immediately. He heard no sound of her flight, but a moment later he thought he saw her dropping down through the trees just outside the circle of light from the fire. From where he was sitting he could see the boat also; he thought he made out the figure of a man sitting in it, on guard. The situation, as Mercer understood it from what Anina told him when she returned, seemed immeasurably worse even than he had anticipated.

Tao had been making the Water City the basis of his insidious propaganda, rather than the Great City, as we had supposed. He had been in constant communication by boat with his men in the Water City; and now affairs there were ripe for more drastic operations.

This boat Mercer had come upon was intended to be Tao's first armed invasion of the Light Country—some twenty of his most trusted men armed with the light-ray. Joining his emissaries in the Water City, and with the large following among the people there which they had already secured, they planned to seize the government and obtain control of the city. Then, using it as a base, they could spread out for a conquest of the entire nation. Mercer listened with whitening face while Anina told him all this as best she could.

"But—but why does he want to attack the Light Country, Anina? I thought he wanted to go and conquer our earth."

"Very big task—your earth," the girl answered. "Light Country more easy. Many light-rays in the Great City. Those he needs before he goes to your earth. More simple to get those than make others."

Mercer understood it then. The large quantity of light-ray ammunition stored in the Great City was what Tao was after. This was his way of getting it, and once he had it, and control of the Light Country besides, he would be in a much better position to attack the earth.

The idea came to Mercer then to steal the boat and escape with it. If he could do that, the enemies would have to return to the Lone City on foot, and the threatened invasion of the Light Country would thus be postponed for a time at least. Meanwhile, with the boat he could hasten back to me with news of the coming invasion.

These thoughts were running through his head while Anina was talking. It was a daring plan, but it might be done. There was apparently only one man in the boat, and the slight rise of ground between it and the fire made him out of sight, though not out of hearing, of the others.

"Can you run the boat, Anina?"

The girl nodded eagerly. Mercer drew a long breath.

"We'll take a chance. It's the only way. They've got that cursed light-ray." He shivered as he thought of the danger they were about to invite.

Then he explained to Anina what they were to do. She listened carefully, with the same expectant, eager look on her face he had seen there so often before.

They left the blanket and fur jacket on the ground, and, making a wide detour around the fire, came back to the river bank several hundred yards above the boat. They stood at the water's edge, looking about them. The boat was just around a slight bend in the stream; the glimmer of the fire showed plainly among the trees. Intense quiet prevailed; only the murmur of the water flowing past, and occasionally the raised voice of one of the men about the fire, broke the stillness.

Mercer stared searchingly into the girl's eyes as she stood there quietly at his side. She met his gaze steadily.

"You're a wonderful little girl," he whispered to her, and then abruptly added: "Come on. Don't make any splash if you can help it. And remember, if anything goes wrong, never mind me. Fly away—if you can."

They waded slowly into the water. The current carried them rapidly along. Side by side, with slow, careful strokes, they swam, keeping close to shore. The river was shallow—hardly over their heads. The water was cold and, Mercer thought, curiously buoyant.

It seemed hardly more than a moment before the shadowy black figure of outlines of the boat loomed ahead. They could make out the figure of its single occupant, sitting with his arm on the gunwale. They swam hardly at all now, letting the current carry them forward. As silent as two drifting logs they dropped down upon the boat and in another moment were clinging to a bit of rope that chanced to be hanging over its stern.

The bow of the boat was nosed against the bank; it lay diagonally downstream, with its stern some twenty feet from shore. Its occupant was sitting amidships, facing the bow. Mercer drew himself up until his eyes were above the stern of the boat and

saw him plainly. He was slouching down as though dozing. His elbow was crooked carelessly over the gunwale.

Mercer's heart gave an exultant leap as he saw a little cylinder in the man's hand.

There was a little projection on the boat at the water line, and, working along this with his hands, Mercer edged slowly toward the man. He knew he could not be heard, for the murmur of the water slipping past the sides of the boat drowned the slight noise he made.

He edged his way along, with not much more than his face out of water, until he was directly beneath the motionless form in the boat.

Mercer's heart was beating so it seemed to smother him. Slowly he pulled himself up until the fingers of his left hand gripped the gunwale hardly more than a foot or two behind the man's back. His other hand reached forward. He must have made a slight noise, for the man sat suddenly upright, listening.

Mercer's right hand shot out. His fingers closed over the little cylinder and the hand holding it. He bent it inward, twisting the man's wrist. His thumb fumbled for the little button Anina had described. There was a tiny puff of light; the man's body wavered, then fell forward inert. Mercer climbed into the boat. He looked back. Anina was pulling herself up over the stern. A long pole lay across the seats. He picked it up and started with it toward the bow. And then he tripped over something and fell headlong, dropping the pole with a clatter.

As he picked himself up there came a shout from the men in the woods. Mercer hurried forward and cast off the rope that held the boat to the bank. It had been tied more or less permanently at this end. As he fumbled at the knots he heard Anina's soft, anxious voice calling: "Hurry, Ollie, hurry!"

The shouts from the woods continued. The knots loosened finally. The boat slid back away from the bank, with the pole Mercer shoved the bow around. An instant later Anina had started the mechanism, and in a broad curve they swung silently out into the river.

Up from the woods shot a beam of the greenish-red light. It darted to and fro for an instant, almost vertically in the air, and Mercer heard the crackle of the tree-tops as they burst into flame under its heat. Then it swung downward, but before it could reach the water level the rise of ground at the bank cut it off.

Without realizing it, Mercer had been holding his breath as he watched. Now he let it out with a long sigh of relief.

"We did it, Anina—we did it," he said exultantly. "And we've got a light-ray, too."

A moment later they swept around a bend in the river, out of sight and out of hearing of their enemies.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE STORM.

ON the little stern seat of the boat Mercer and Anina sat side by side, the girl steering by a small tiller that lay between them. They were well out in the middle of the river now, speeding silently along with its swift current. They made extraordinary speed. Both banks of the river were visible in the twilight—dim, wooded hills stretching back into darkness.

The stream widened steadily as they advanced, until near its mouth it had become a broad estuary. They followed its right shore now and soon were out in the Narrow Sea.

"We'd better go right on across," said Mercer. "It's too early for Alan to be at the end of the trail. He won't be there till to-night. We can reach the Great City before he starts."

They decided to do that, and headed straight out into the sea. They had been cold, sitting there in the wind, and wet to the skin. But the boat contained several furry jackets, which the men had left in it, and in the bottom, near the stern, a cubical metal box which lighted up like an electric radiator. By this they had dried and warmed themselves, and now, each with a fur jacket on, they felt thoroughly comfortable.

Mercer was elated at what they had accomplished. He could see now how fortunate a circumstance it was that we had set the men free. He would not have stumbled upon this other party, and the invasion of the Light Country would have begun, had we not released them.

He talked enthusiastically about what we were to do next, and Anina listened, saying very little, but following his words with eager attention. Once he thought she was more interested in the words themselves than in what he was saying, and said so.

"Your language—so very easy it is. I want to learn it soon if I can."

"Why, you know it already," he protested. "And how the deuce you ever got it so quickly beats me."

She smiled.

"When you say words—very easy then for me to remember. Not many words in spoken language."

He shook his head.

"Well, however you do it, the result's all right. I'm mighty glad, too. Why, when I get you back home on earth—" He stopped in sudden confusion.

She put her hand on his arm.

"Miela says your earth is very wonderful. Tell me about it."

She listened to his glowing words. "And opera—what is that?" she asked once when he paused.

He described the Metropolitan Opera House, and the newer, finer one in Boston. She listened to his description of the music with flushed face and shining eyes.

"How beautiful—that music! Can *you* sing, Ollie?"

"No," he admitted, "but I can play a little on a guitar. I wish I had one here."

"I can sing," said the girl. "Miela says I can sing very well."

He leaned toward her, brushing the blue feathers of her wing lightly with his hand.

"Sing for me," he said softly. "I'll bet you sing beautifully."

It may have been their situation, or what they had been through together, or the girl's nearness to him now, with her long braids of golden hair, the graceful sweep of her blue-feathered wings that matched the blue of her eyes, her red lips parted in

song—but whatever it was, Mercer thought he had never heard so sweet a voice. She sang a weird little song. It was in a minor key, with curious cadences that died away and ended nowhere—the folk song of a different race, a different planet, yet vibrant with the ever unsatisfied longing of the human soul.

She sang softly, staring straight before her, without thought of her singing, thinking only of her song. She ended with a tender phrase that might have been a sigh—a quivering little half sob that died away in her throat and left the song unfinished. Her hands were folded quiet in her lap; her eyes gazed out on the gray waste of water about the boat.

Mercer breathed again.

"That is beautiful, Anina. What is it?"

She turned to him and smiled.

"Just love song. You like it, my friend Ollie?"

"It's wonderful. But it's—it's so sad—and—and sort of weird, isn't it?"

"That is love, my mother says. Love is sad."

Mercer's heart was beating fast.

"Is it always sad, Anina? I don't think so—do you?"

There was no trace of coquetry in her eyes; she sighed tremulously.

"I do not know about love. But what I feel here"—she put her hand on her breast—"I do not understand, Ollie. And when I sing—they are very sad and sweet, the thoughts of music, and they say things to the heart that the brain does not understand. Is it that way with you?"

Unnoticed by the two, a storm cloud had swept up over the horizon behind them, and the sky overhead was blotted now with its black. They had not seen it nor heeded the distant flashing of lightning. A sudden thunderclap startled them now into consciousness of the scene about them. The wind rushed on them from behind. The sea was rising rapidly; the boat scudded before it.

"A storm! Look at it, Anina, behind us!"

There was nothing in sight now but the gray sea, broken into waves that were beginning to curl, white and angry. Behind

them the darkness was split with jagged forks of lightning. The thunder rolled heavily and ominously in the distance, with occasional sharp cracks near at hand.

Look, Anina—there comes the rain! See it there behind us! I hope it won't be a bad storm. I wouldn't want to be out in this little tub."

The wind veered to the left, increasing steadily. The sea was lashed into foam; its spray swept over the boat, drenching them thoroughly.

The waves, turning now with the wind, struck the boat on its stern quarter. One curled aboard, sloshing an inch or two of water about the bottom of the boat. Mercer feared it would interfere with the mechanism, but Anina reassured him.

As the waves increased in size, Mercer swung the boat around so as to run directly before them. The stern frequently was lifted clear of the water now, the boat losing headway as a great cloud of hissing steam arose from behind.

After a time the Light Country shore came into sight. They were close upon it before they saw it through the rain and murk. They seemed to be heading diagonally toward it.

"Where are we, Anina?" Mercer asked anxiously.

The girl shook her head.

Steadily they were swept inward. The shore line, as they drew closer, was to Mercer quite unfamiliar. There were no bayous here, no inundated land. Instead, a bleak line of cliffs fronted them—a perpendicular wall against which the waves beat furiously. They could see only a short distance. The line of cliffs extended ahead of them out of sight in the gray of the sheets of rain.

They were slanting toward the cliffs, and Mercer knew if he did not do something they would be driven against them in a few moments more.

"We'll have to turn out, Anina. We can't land along here. We must keep away if we can."

With the waves striking its stern quarter again, the boat made much heavier weather. It seemed to Mercer incredible that it should stay afloat. He found himself thor-

oughly frightened now, but when he remembered that Anina was in no danger he felt relieved. He had made her lie down in the boat, where she would be more sheltered from the wind and rain. Now he hastily bade her get up and sit beside him.

"We might be swamped any minute, Anina. You sit there where you won't get caught if we go over."

They swept onward, Mercer keeping the boat offshore as best he could.

"Haven't you any idea where we are, Anina? How far along do these cliffs extend?"

A huge, jagged pinnacle of rock, like a great cathedral spire set in the cliff, loomed into view ahead. Anina's face brightened when she saw it.

"The way to the Water City," she cried. "A river there is—ahead. Not so very far now."

In spite of all Mercer could do, they were blowing steadily closer to the wave-lashed cliffs.

He began to despair. "If anything happens, Anina—you fly up at once. You hear? Don't you wait. You can't help me any. I'll make out some way. You say good-by to Alan and your mother and sister for me—if—" He fell silent a moment, then said softly: "And, Anina, if that should happen, I want you to know that I think you're the sweetest, most wonderful little girl I ever met. And, Anina dear—"

The girl gripped his arm with a cry of joy.

"See, Ollie! There, ahead, the cliffs end. That is the Water City river! See it there?"

The mouth of a broad estuary, with the waves rolling up into it, came swiftly into view. They rounded the rocky headland and entered it, running now almost directly before the wind. The river narrowed after a short distance to a stream very much like the one they had left in the Twilight Country.

Mercer turned to the quiet little girl beside him.

"Well, Anina, we've certainly had some trip. I wouldn't want to go through it again."

Mercer thought the situation over. They could stay where they were in the river for an hour or two until the storm was entirely over, and then go back to the Great City. On the other hand, now that they were here, Mercer felt a great curiosity to see this other city where Tao's men had created trouble. Why should they not use these few hours of waiting to see it?

"We might get a line on how things stand up there to tell Alan when we get back," Mercer said when he explained his ideas to Anina. "It won't take long." Very probably it was the light-ray cylinder in his hand which influenced his decision, for he added: "We can't get into any trouble, you know; there's no light-ray here yet."

And so they went on.

There was a perceptible current coming down the river. The water was cold and clear, and in the brighter light now he could see down into it in many places to the bottom, six or eight feet below. The region seemed utterly uninhabited; no sign of a house or even a boat on the river met them as they advanced.

"Mightn't there be boats along here?" Mercer asked once. "How far up is this place?"

"Not far now—beyond there."

The river appeared to terminate abruptly up ahead against the side of a frowning brown cliff, but Mercer saw a moment later that it opened out around a bend to the left.

"Around that next bend?"

She nodded.

It seemed incredible to Mercer that the second largest city in Mercury lay hidden in the midst of this desolation.

"We'll meet boats," he said. "What will the people think of me? Don't let's start anything if we can help it."

"You lie there." Anina indicated the bottom of the boat at her feet. "No one see you then. I steer. They do not notice me. Nobody care who I am."

Mercer had still the very vaguest of ideas as to what they would do when they got to the Water City. As a matter of fact, he really was more curious just to see it than anything else. But there was another reason that urged him on. Both he and Anina were hungry.

They had eaten very little since leaving the Great City the night before; and now that it was again evening, they were famished. They had rummaged the boat thoroughly, but evidently the men had taken all their supplies ashore with them, for nothing was in the boat.

"We'll have to dope out some way to get something to eat," said Mercer.

They came upon the sharp bend in the river Anina had indicated. Following close against one rocky shore, they swept around the bend, and the Water City lay spread out before Mercer's astonished eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE WATER CITY.

IT had stopped raining; the sky overhead was luminous with diffused sunlight; the scene that lay before Mercer was plainly visible. The river had opened abruptly into a broad, shallow, nearly circular lake, some five or six miles across. The country here showed an extraordinary change from that they had passed through. The lake appeared to occupy a depression in the surrounding hills, like the bottom of a huge, shallow bowl. From the water's edge on all sides the ground sloped upward. It was no longer a barren, rocky land, but seemingly covered with a rich heavy soil, dotted with tropical trees. That it was under a high state of cultivation was evident. Mercer saw tier upon tier of rice terraces on the hillsides.

But what astonished him most was the city itself. It covered almost the entire surface of the lake—a huge collection of little palm-thatched shacks built upon platforms raised above the water on stilts. Some of the houses were larger and built of stone, with their foundations in the water.

Off to one side were two or three little islands, an acre or less in extent, fringed with palms and coconut trees. In nearly the center of the lake stood a stone castle, two stories in height, with minarets ornamenting its corners. An open stretch of water surrounded it.

There was little of regularity about this extraordinary city, and no evidence of

streets, for the houses were set down quite haphazard wherever open space afforded. In some places they were more crowded together than others, although seldom closer than twenty or thirty feet.

Around the larger ones there was a little more open water, as though the owners controlled it and forbade building there. Some of the smaller houses were connected by little wooden bridges. Anina said this was where two or more families of relatives had located together.

There were a few boats moving about—little punts hollowed out of logs and propelled by long poles—and Mercer saw many others, some of them larger like the one he and Anina were in, tied up by the houses. It was now the time of the evening meal. The workers had returned from the terraces; there were few moving about the city. Occasionally a girl would dart up from one of the houses and wing her way to another, but beyond that there were no signs of activity.

Anina took command of the boat now, slowing it down and heading for the nearest of the houses, which were hardly more than quarter of a mile away. Mercer stretched himself out in the bottom of the boat, covering himself with a large piece of fabric that lay there. He felt that he would be unnoticed, even should a girl chance to pass directly overhead. But he could see nothing of the city from where he was, and soon grew restless and anxious to do something else.

"I'm coming up, Anina," he said once. "Shucks! Nobody can do anything to us. Haven't I got this light-ray?"

But Anina was obdurate, and made him stay where he was.

They went slowly forward and were soon among the houses. On the front platform of one a man sat fishing. A little naked boy slid down into the water from another, swimming as though born to the water. Both stared at Anina curiously as she passed slowly by, but they said nothing. A girl looked out of the window of another house and waved her hand in friendly greeting, which Anina answered.

Mercer, lying with all but his face covered by the cloth, could see only the sides

of the boat, the bottom of the cross-seat over his head, and Anina as she sat above him in the stern.

"Where do you suppose the Tao people hang out around here?" he suddenly asked. "If we could—"

The girl silenced him with a gesture.

He lowered his voice. "Try and find out where they are, Anina," he whispered.

Anina steered the boat directly under several of the houses, which must have been quite a usual proceeding, for it attracted no attention. A girl flew close to them once, and Anina called to her. The girl alighted on the stern of the boat for a moment; Mercer slid the cloth over his face and held himself motionless. Then he heard Anina's voice calling to him softly. He slid the cloth back; the girl had gone.

"She says Tao's men live there—large house, of wood," said Anina, pointing off to one side.

Mercer nearly rapped his head against the seat above him in his excitement.

"You know which house? Let's go there. Maybe we can hear what they're saying. Can we get under it?"

She nodded.

"Let's try, Anina," he said eagerly. "You steer us slow right under it, just as if you were going past. If there's nobody in sight you can stop underneath, can't you? Maybe we can hear what they're saying."

"I try," the girl said simply.

"I'll lay still," encouraged Mercer. "Nobody will bother about you. Just sneak in and see what happens. If anybody sees you, keep going."

He was all excitement, and in spite of Anina's protests wriggled about continually, trying to see where they were.

The house that the girl had pointed out lay only a few hundred yards ahead. It was one of the largest of the wooden buildings—sixty or seventy feet long at least—single story, with a high sloping thatched roof.

It was raised on a platform some six feet above the water, which, in front, had a little flight of wooden steps leading down to the surface. There was a hundred feet of open water on all sides of the building.

The boat, moving slowly, slipped through the water almost without a sound.

"Where are we now?" Mercer whispered impatiently. "Aren't we there yet?"

The girl put a finger to her lips. "Almost there. Quiet now."

She steered straight for the house. There was no one in sight, either about the house itself or about those in its immediate vicinity. A moment more and the boat slid beneath the building into semidarkness.

Anina shut the power off and stood up. The floor of the house was just above her head. In front of her, near the center of the building, she saw the side walls of an inner inclosure some twenty feet square. These walls came down to the surface, making a room like a basement to the dwelling. A broad doorway, with a sliding door that now stood open, gave ingress.

The boat had now almost lost headway. Anina nosed its bow into this doorway, and grasping one of the pilings near at hand, brought it to rest.

Mercer, at a signal from her, climbed cautiously to his feet, still holding the little light-ray cylinder in his hand.

"What's that in there?" he whispered.

Beyond the doorway, through which the bow of the boat projected, there was complete darkness.

"Lower room," Anina whispered back. "Store things in there. And boat landing, too."

"Let's go in and see."

Mercer started toward the bow of the boat. Six feet or more of it was inside the doorway. He made his way carefully into the bow, and found himself inside the basement of the house.

In the dimness of this interior he could just make out the outlines of things around. The doorway was located at a corner of the inclosure. In front lay a small open space of water. At one side a platform about two feet above the surface formed the floor of the room. A tiny punt lay moored to it. Farther back a small, steep flight of steps led up through a rectangular opening to the building above.

Most of the light in this lower room came down through this opening; and now, as Mercer stood quiet looking about him, he

could hear plainly the voices of men in the room above.

Anina was beside him.

"They're up there," he whispered, pointing. "Let's land and see if we can get up those stairs a ways and hear what they're saying."

They stood a moment, undecided, and then from the silence and darkness about them they distinctly heard a low muffled sound.

"What's that?" whispered Mercer, startled. "Didn't you hear that, Anina? There's something over there by the bottom of the steps."

They listened, but only the murmur of the voices from above, and an occasional footstep, broke the stillness.

"I tell you I heard something," Mercer persisted. "There's something over there." He rattled a bit of rope incautiously, as if to startle a rat from its hiding place. "Let's tie up, Anina."

They made the boat fast, but in such a way that they could cast it loose quickly.

"We might want to get out of here in a hurry," Mercer whispered with a grin. "You never can tell, Anina."

He stood stock still. The sound near at hand was repeated. It was unmistakable this time—a low, stifled moan.

Mercer stepped lightly out of the boat onto the platform. A few boxes, a coil of rope, and other odds and ends stood about. He felt his way forward among them toward the bottom of the steps. He heard the moan again, and now he saw the outlines of a human figure lying against the farther wall.

Anina was close behind him.

"There's somebody over there," he whispered. "Hurt or sick, maybe."

They crept forward.

It was a woman, bound hand and foot and gagged. Mercer bent over and tore the cloth from her face. In another instant Anina was upon her knees, sobbing softly, with her mother's head in her lap.

They loosed the cords that held her, and chaffed her stiffened limbs. She soon recovered, for she was not injured. She told Anina her story then—how Baar had captured her in her home while she was waiting

for Miela and me, and how two of his men had brought her here to the Water City by boat at once.

That was all she knew, except that this house was the headquarters of Tao's emissaries, who, it appeared, were now allied with Baar and his party.

Anina whispered all this to Mercer when her mother had finished.

"Let's get out of here," said Mercer.

The responsibility of two women, especially the elder Lua, who could not fly, weighed suddenly upon him, and his first thought was to get back to the Great City at once.

Anina helped her mother into the boat.

"Wait," she whispered to Mercer. "I hear what they say. You wait here."

She went to the foot of the steps and began climbing them cautiously.

"Not on your life, I won't wait here," Mercer muttered to himself, and, gripping the light-ray cylinder firmly as though he feared it might get away from him, he joined Anina on the stairway.

Slowly, cautiously they made their way upward. The steps were fairly wide, and they went up almost side by side. From near the top they could see a portion of the room above.

The corner of a table showed, around which a number of men were gathered, eating. A woman was moving about the room serving them.

Their words, from here, were plainly audible. Mercer would have gone a step or two higher, without thought of discovery, but Anina held him back. "Wait, Ollie. I hear now what they say."

They stood silent. The men were talk-

ing earnestly. Mercer could hear their words, but of course understood nothing he heard.

"What do they say, Anina?" he whispered impatiently after a moment.

"Baar is here with two or three of his men. He talks with Tao's men. They talk about men from Twilight Country. Waiting for them now. Speak of storm. Worried—because men do not come. Waiting for light-ray."

"They'll have a long wait," Mercer chuckled. "Let's get out of here, Anina."

He must have made a slight noise, or perhaps he and Anina, crouching there on the stairs, were seen by some one above. He never knew quite how it occurred, but, without warning, a man stood at the opening, looking down at them.

There was a shout, and the room above was in instant turmoil. Mercer lost his head. Anina pulled at him and said something, but he did not hear her. He only knew that they had been discovered, and that most of their enemies in the Water City were crowded together in this one room at hand. And *he* had the light-ray—the only one in the city.

A sudden madness possessed him. He tore away from Anina and, climbing up the steps of the stairway, leaped into the room above.

Twenty or thirty men faced him, most of them about the table. Several had started hastily to their feet; two or three chairs were overturned.

The man who had been looking down into the opening darted back as Mercer came up, and shouted again.

Mercer saw it was Baar.

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK**



THE 155TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO  
BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

## THE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN ATOM

By RAY CUMMINGS

(ALLSTORY WEEKLY, March 15, 1919.)

Published in book form by Methuen, London, England. Price 7/6 net.



# The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,  
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,  
and GEORGE BARTON.

## III.—THE CHALKED HAT.

THIS is the hitherto unpublished tale of the strange disappearance of five one-thousand-dollar bank notes, the collapse of a powerful lobby at Albany, and the curious self-exile of a prominent public man with a high-sounding military title. At the time any one of these things would have been considered worth a first-page story in the metropolitan journals, but combined they made a drama that set the whole State by the ears and started thousands of gossiping tongues wagging.

Peabody Smith never figured in the epi-

sode publicly, but he was intimately connected with it through the part he played as the special investigator of the Good Government League. The organization was non-partisan, and the sole purpose of its existence was to break up a system of lobbying that was corrupting the politics of the Commonwealth. The decent men who were back of the league were neither theorists nor reformers in the ordinary sense of the term. They did not care which party or faction was in the saddle so long as the air of the capitol was fit to breathe.

The first story of this series appeared in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for October 28.

The central figure in the interesting business was Amos Briggs, a young farmer from one of the rural counties up the State, and a newly elected member of the Assembly. When Amos reached Albany for the first time in his life he was as green as the grass on his well-cultivated farm, and just as attractive and wholesome. He was a small man with a smooth-shaven face, tanned by much exposure to the elements. He was awkward in his movements, but he had more than his share of native shrewdness, and he possessed a most ingratiating personality. In other words, five minutes after you met Amos you like him and wanted to know him better. He looked at you out of a pair of sky-blue eyes, and when he smiled it warmed you like a bit of sunshine on a dreary day.

His coming to Albany was in celebration of two very important events in his otherwise prosaic life. The first one was his election as a member of the Assembly, and the second was his marriage. If he had told you himself he would have put his marriage as first in importance and his election second. At all events, he brought his blushing bride with him on what he was pleased to call his honeymoon.

And blushing in this case is no mere figure of speech because the roses that came and went on the cheeks of Jenny Briggs were the products of Dame Nature, and depended not at all on the powder box or the rouge pot. She was exceedingly proud of Amos and looked upon him as another Daniel Webster, a flattering opinion that was never for a moment shared by the young farmer-statesman. She interested herself in his work and soon became fairly conversant with the meaning of politics. She even went so far as to give an afternoon tea to the wives of some of the other members, on which occasion she served salad sandwiches with a new kind of home dressing that made her the envy of all her guests.

It was when the session was about five weeks old that the cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared on the political horizon. It came with the introduction of the bill consolidating certain public utilities, and it was fathered by Edward Knight, man of affairs and president of the Monroe Trac-

tion Company. On its face it was a reasonable piece of legislation, but when Colonel William Hartman began to work for its passage, Peabody Smith became suspicious.

Hartman was a professional lobbyist. He was a big, broad-shouldered man, well groomed, with a brown mustache waxed to a perfect point. He was suave but forceful, and had the reputation of always carrying everything before him. There were other persuasive gentlemen who solicited votes for various dubious measures, but they were as novices when compared with Colonel Hartman. No one knew where he had received his military title, but all agreed that he was the King of Lobbyists.

One day Mrs. Henry Maynes, wife of the floor leader, called on Jenny Briggs and invited the little lady and her husband to take dinner with herself and her husband that evening. Jenny was all in a flutter and spent many anxious moments in deciding what she would wear on that auspicious occasion. When the time arrived they found themselves in a private dining room in the hotel, and a little later were served with a repast that would have tickled the palate of the most confirmed diner-out.

It was a small party: Mr. and Mrs. Maynes, Mr. and Mrs. Briggs, and Colonel William Hartman. The lobbyist was the joker in the deck. He devoted himself painstakingly to Mrs. Briggs. Before long they discovered that they were old friends. He was born and raised in the same county with her. He remembered that he had taken her to a dance, and before the dinner was over, he was jokingly reproving Amos Briggs for having robbed him of the girl of his heart. It was when the ice cream was being served that the bill of the Monroe Traction Company came up for discussion. The merits of the measure were glowingly explained, and Colonel Hartman ended by asking Amos Briggs to vote for it.

Amos and Jenny were both glowing with the unwonted excitement of the banquet. The fine linen, the beautiful flowers, the music from an adjoining room all tended to make them happy and complaisant. But the bump of caution was well developed in the young farmer-legislator, and he declined to be drawn into any trap. He refused to

pledge his vote, but agreed to give the measure his consideration. And when he walked home with his bride that night he was in a very thoughtful frame of mind.

The next day he looked further into the matter, and the more he learned about the bill the less he liked it. As time wore on he met Colonel Hartman frequently, and that gentleman was always courteous and affable—and never mentioned the bill of the Monroe Traction Company. Amos became very quiet, and Jenny watched him as a bird watches its young, and knew what he was thinking about.

For the first time in their brief married life he failed to confide in her, and this disturbed Jenny mightily. Could it be possible that a bill over which men were disputing so loudly would disturb the serenity of their domestic bliss? Once after this Jenny gave a little luncheon to Mr. and Mrs. Maynes. Tactfully enough she had omitted Colonel Hartman from her guests. The man evidently disturbed Amos, and for this reason she did not propose to have him at her table. In spite of this concession Amos was moody and absent-minded, and scarcely spoke during the meal. Before they separated he asked Maynes some questions regarding the Monroe Traction bill, and seemed to ponder a long while over the answers.

In the meanwhile Peabody Smith, at his end of the capitol, was watching the bill like a hawk and was keeping Colonel William Hartman in sight. He knew that the friends of the measure, and its opponents, had counted noses, and that they were just about evenly divided. A wave of the hand in either direction might determine the result. The passage or the defeat of the bill might depend upon a single vote.

The long-legged detective mingled with the members, looked at them in his sad way, smiled occasionally, but was as silent as the grave, and seemed to absorb information through the pores of his skin. He had learned a great deal about Colonel William Hartman, but he lacked the final, convincing, bit of proof that would put that gentleman out of business and smash the Albany lobby. There were times when he thought that Amos Briggs might be the instrument

he needed. And then again he was fearful to put the young man to the test. He had known so many promising legislators to succumb to temptation.

It was on a Monday afternoon just before the final adjournment of the Legislature that Peabody sat in the little office near the capitol. He had accomplished something for the Good Government League, but with Colonel Hartman at large and flourishing he could not help feeling that his stay at Albany was somewhat of a failure. The manner in which Hartman had greased the ways for the Monroe Traction bill proved that he was a master in his art. The bill had passed first and second reading, and in the morning it would come up for third reading and final passage.

Peabody Smith knew that both sides expected to win, but he felt, gloomily enough, that Colonel Hartman was going to carry home the bacon. The battle was dangerously close. Many members were away, but the latest calculation showed eighty for, and eighty against the bill. That took no account of Amos Briggs.

And his report had Amos Briggs on the fence!

He wanted to talk to the young farmer, and yet he did not know just how to approach him. It is not quite the thing to go to a man and ask him if he is honest. While he sat there deliberating with half-closed eyes, there was a gentle tap on the door, and in walked Jenny Briggs. It was like an answer to a prayer.

Peabody Smith was on his feet in an instant, tendering her a chair. He noticed that her face was very white and that she looked tired. But there was determination in her eyes, and something very like strength in the way she held her chin. She smiled feebly.

"You know me," she said in a low voice. "I don't have to introduce myself."

"I should say not," protested the detective as he favored her with one of his rare grins, "and now tell me what I can do for you."

"I want your advice," she began quickly. "Amos might not like my coming here, but I'm doing it for his sake as well as my own. I'm sure we can trust you and that you will

protect us. Maybe I'm all wrong, but after you hear, you can tell better than any one in Albany."

"It's about the Monroe Traction bill," ventured Peabody, with gleaming teeth and a fatherly smile.

"How did you know that?" she cried, startled.

"I'm sort of a mind reader," he confessed, "and, besides, I've been keeping my eyes on things. That's why I'm here."

"Well, you are right. I've tried to find out how Amos was going to vote on that bill and he refused to tell me. He was real cross about it—the first time he's been cross with me since we were married. He said I must mind my own business and not mix in politics. As a matter of fact, I don't care how he votes, but I'm anxious about him. My friends have been telling me that no matter what he does he will be sure to get in wrong. What does that mean?"

The innocence with which she asked this question, with upturned eyes, made Peabody Smith laugh. He was sorry the moment he did so and spoke to her gently.

"That's a political phrase," he explained, "and it means that he will place himself in a false position. But whether he does depends entirely on himself. What else do you hear?"

"I was also told," she continued, with the air of a child making a confession, "that Colonel Hartman had chalked my husband's hat. I don't know what that means and I was ashamed to ask."

"It's mere political lingo," said the detective, "and you have no reason to be ashamed of your ignorance. To be brutally frank, it is the business of Colonel Hartman to get votes for the Monroe Traction bill. If necessary, he pays members to vote for it. Sometimes a member votes for a bill voluntarily and the lobbyist claims credit for having won his vote. In other words, he 'collects' for having influenced that vote. That's what they mean when they say his hat has been chalked. He is unconscious of the fact that some unscrupulous lobbyist is using his vote as a commodity. Do you get the idea?"

Jenny Briggs flushed, and involuntarily put her hands to her face.

"Oh, isn't that perfectly dreadful. I was afraid that Hartman was engaged in some underhand business. And the mean part of it is that he is using his former acquaintance with me to injure my husband. I'm perfectly sure that Amos is as honest as the day is long, but I am afraid that Hartman will try to get him in what you call a false position. I met him a little while ago and he asked me to tell Amos that he was coming to see him to-night. I don't know what to do, and that is why I came to see you."

"My advice is to let him see your husband. It can do no harm and it may do some good. We will catch this rat in a trap."

"But I dread the publicity."

Peabody Smith did some quick thinking. He looked Jenny Briggs in the eyes.

"Mrs. Briggs," he said finally, "I have perfect confidence in your husband just as I have in you. That meeting must take place. Your husband should have a witness, because Hartman would swear to anything. Let things take their course, and I'll guarantee that there will be no publicity—at least, none of the kind that you dread."

He walked to the door with her and tried to reassure her, but she went away very much distracted, and wondering if she had not made a bad situation worse.

## II.

At eight o'clock that evening Amos Briggs sat at a little desk in the living room of their apartment, industriously writing. His wife, not far away, was engaged on some fancy lace work. She looked at him anxiously from time to time, and wondered whether she dared speak of the Monroe Traction bill and of Colonel William Hartman. She had not told him of Hartman's intention to call, and she was wondering if she had made a mistake. Sometimes they went to the movies together, and as she sat there, she was hoping that he might propose to go and see a picture. It was not too late, and if he happened to be out when Hartman called it might change the whole course of their lives. Jenny Briggs did not pretend to be a philosopher, but she knew

that great issues sometimes depended on small events. Suddenly he turned and looked at her over his shoulder.

"Oh, by the way, Jenny, I expect Colonel Hartman to come in to see me this evening."

She flushed at the announcement. It was as though Amos had accused her of deceit. He knew that Hartman was coming and she had said nothing about it. But if there was any hidden meaning behind his words it was not to be detected in his manner. Already he had resumed his writing. She felt that she must make some response.

"Some business, I suppose," she ventured; "some political business?"

He nodded without turning his head.

"Yes, political business, and possibly something that may be very important to me personally."

She felt her heart sinking.

"Maybe you would like me to go out—maybe you would like to see Colonel Hartman alone?"

He seemed to be deliberating.

"Now that you mention it," he replied slowly, measuring his words, "it might be just as well for you to remain here."

That helped to calm her beating heart, but only for a moment.

"It might be well," Amos was saying, "if you would make up a few of those salad sandwiches for which you are famous. Colonel Hartman likes them very much. I'm going to offer him one of them. I wouldn't want him to think that we were lacking in hospitality."

Her heart felt like lead now. How could Amos take that tone toward a man who was so well known as the King of the Lobbyists? She felt that she was on the verge of hysteria. She did not know whether to laugh or cry. At that moment there was a tap on the door, and Colonel Hartman entered the room.

He was in the pink of condition, and bubbling over with good nature. As always, he was well groomed. His tailor had somehow managed to cover his two hundred pounds of flesh so that he seemed youthful and the picture of style. His broad shoulders were thrown back, and he walked with a springy step. Although the snow was on

the ground he wore a red rose in his button-hole. A man—on the surface, at least—to be admired and envied.

Amos Briggs arose slowly to meet his guest, and as the two stood facing each other it was impossible not to contrast them. Amos was small—so small that he seemed undersized, yet this was more of an impression than a fact. His weather-beaten face was undeniably homely. His clothes fit him badly, and candor compels the admission that his trousers were very much bagged at the knees. He did not shine as he stood beside the bluff, hearty man of the world. He pointed to a chair, and the colonel sat down with the air of a man who was at peace with all the world.

"A pretty picture of domesticity," he boomed over at Jenny, "with the head of the house engaged in the tasks of a law-maker and the wife doing her little household chores."

Jenny smiled, but inwardly she was ill at ease. Colonel Hartman turned to Amos with his most businesslike manner.

"Speaking of lawmaking, we are counting on you to vote for the Monroe Traction bill. It's a good thing for the State, and it will be a good thing for your district. But I didn't come to talk of the merits of the bill. You know all about that. I'm here to let you know that we are not insensible of the good will of our friends."

Amos, who had seated himself, remained silent at this outburst. The colonel looked in the direction of Jenny Briggs.

"I suppose—ah—that we can talk freely in the presence of the little lady?"

Something like a grin hovered around the lips of Amos Briggs.

"I always do," he said dryly.

"Very good! Very good!" exclaimed the colonel, as though greatly relieved. "Now I was going to say that it is quite possible that you may have a mortgage on the farm. Wouldn't it be a fine thing to lift the incumbrance and to take a fresh start? It is no joke to go on farming year after year with a thing like that—"

"My farm," interrupted Amos, "is perfectly clear."

The colonel was disconcerted, but only for a moment.

"Fine, fine!" he cried. "You always were a thrifty fellow. Congratulations. But we all need money for one reason or another. That reminds me. You have just been married. Why not take a long wedding trip? You ought to go to Niagara and all the other places. Give the little lady a little treat. Eh? What? You are thinking that vacation trips cost money?"

"Yes," replied Amos, meditatively, "they do take money."

"Sometimes," persisted the colonel, "they take a lot of money."

"Yes," assented the little man with monotonous iteration, "sometimes they take a lot of money."

The colonel was positively beaming now.

"That," he said, "explains my presence here this evening. You can turn your head away and I'm going to lay something on your desk. You don't see me put it there and I won't see you pick it up. Nobody will be the wiser. I hope you get me?"

Amos stared at Colonel Hartman while he spoke, and presently the lobbyist opened his coat and pulled out a long wallet. He reached in and carefully brought out a one-thousand-dollar bank note and laid it on the edge of the little desk. Amos gazed on it like a man fascinated. Then the tempter brought out another until five crisp notes of the same denomination lay there in a heap.

The colonel put his wallet back in his pocket and arose with the smile of a philanthropist on his broad face. He made a gesture of farewell that was intended to include them both, and then exclaimed:

"Now, what do you think of your friend Colonel Hartman?"

Jenny Briggs, on the other side of the room, watched this performance with the intensified interest of a spectator at a play. Her heart went *pit-a-pat*, and an invisible hand seemed to be clutching at her throat. She tried to speak, but her voice failed her. It suddenly seemed to her that Amos was drowning and that she was powerless to save him. She was gazing at him out of distended eyes when he slowly arose and faced the big man. He licked his lips with the tip of his tongue, and began to speak, very slowly.

"You've asked me a question," he said, "and I'm going to answer it. I think you are a dirty cur! You have the shape of a man, but you are not a man at all. I wouldn't use you to wipe my feet on. I've known this was coming for a long time, but I wondered whether you'd have the nerve to go ahead with it."

Colonel Hartman looked at the little farmer as if he thought he had gone mad. He heard his opening sentence with amazement. As Amos went on, the face of the lobbyist turned white, and a sickly smile gathered about his lips.

"Do—do I understand that you don't want the money?" he managed to say.

"Understand?" shouted Amos, raising his voice. "Why, you white-livered, black-hearted, double-faced, snake-eyed crawling son of a sea cook, I wouldn't touch your tainted money with a forty-foot pole!"

"Not so loud," cautioned the colonel, his lips trembling; "some one will hear you."

"I want to be heard," shouted Amos, his eyes flashing and his tanned face reddening. "I'm sick and tired of your whispering and your lick-spittle talk. I've got some things to tell you and I want you to listen."

"I think I'd better be going," said Hartman with a badly forced laugh; "we—we don't seem to be getting along."

"Jenny," cried Amos, turning suddenly to his wife, "lock the door. I've got a few arguments to present to this fake colonel, and I don't want him to leave until I get through."

"What do you mean by arguments?" said Hartman, his face as white as a sheet.

"These," exulted Amos, lifting his two sturdy arms in the air, "two of the most convincing arguments you ever listened to. They're not the kind you're accustomed to, and they may do you a lot of good."

Jenny Briggs, in a sudden access of joy had turned the key in the lock, and slipped it in her pocket. Her heart was beating, but it was with exultation. Amos had not failed her, and she was enjoying the happiest moment of her life. The thought that he might be in personal danger never occurred to her.

"Get over nearer the light," thundered Amos to Hartman.

As he moved slightly, the young farmer gave him a wallop in the jaw that sent him staggering into the corner. He recovered, and coming toward Amos, doubled his fist menacingly.

"You've invited violence," he quivered, "and you—you'll have to take the consequences."

"Consequences hell!" screamed the now thoroughly aroused one. "Why, you haven't the courage of a cat. You're a stuffed shirt. You're a big worm," and then, words failing him, he pitched in and gave the big man a drubbing that blacked his eyes, caused his nose to bleed, and left him all but a physical wreck.

He sat down, panting, while Hartman, with all of the dignity he was able to assume, took out his handkerchief and wiped his hands and nose. Then, getting up, he walked toward the table and reached for the five one-thousand-dollar bills.

"Hands off!" shouted Amos.

Hartman looked amazed, and then a sneer began to curl about his bruised lips.

"So," he said huskily, "you are going to take the money after all?"

"No," replied Amos, "but I can't let you go without showing you a little hospitality." Then, turning to his wife, he said: "Jenny, let's have one of your sandwiches for Colonel Hartman."

Daintily she tripped to the rear of the room and brought two tiny slices of bread with a leaf of lettuce and covered with her incomparable dressing. Amos took the food, and opening the slices of bread, deftly inserted the bank notes from the table.

"Now," he said, handing the remarkable sandwich to the lobbyist, "eat that!"

"What—do—do you mean?" stammered Hartman, trembling.

"Just what I say. I made you eat your words, and now I'm going to make you eat your bribe."

"You're crazy," cried Hartman, "you've done enough without this nonsense."

There was murder in the eyes of Amos Briggs, but he spoke evenly:

"Eat that, and eat it right away, or I'll beat you to a pulp. As there's a God above me, I mean what I say!"

Colonel Hartman felt the apprehension that one feels in the presence of a violent lunatic, and humiliating and absurd as it was, he slowly ate every crumb of the most expensive sandwich ever prepared in Albany. As he finished, Amos took the key from Jenny, whistled down the corridor, and the next moment Peabody Smith entered the room, smilingly.

"Did he eat it?" he asked significantly.

"Yes," smiled Amos, "and enjoyed it. Don't you notice him licking his lips?"

The detective turned on Hartman and spoke to him in the tone of a judge addressing the prisoner at the bar.

"Hartman," he said, "there's a train leaving here to-night. If you are not out of the city and State in twelve hours, I'll send you to the penitentiary!"

For a moment the bedraggled one made a show of resistance.

"I'll—I'll not stand for this outrage," he cried. "I'll tell the whole story!"

Peabody Smith laughed.

"What! Tell the truth and make yourself the joke of the whole State? You know better than that, Hartman."

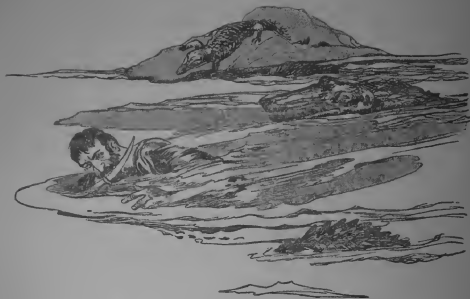
The King of the Lobbyists confessed defeat, for he turned and slunk out of the room, like a dog with its tail between its legs.

The next morning, when the Monroe Traction bill came up for final passage, Amos Briggs voted "No," in a voice that could be heard all over the chamber, and the measure went down to merited defeat. The most astonished man in the State capital was Mr. Edward Knight, president of the Monroe Traction Company. He shook his head as one who has lost faith in human nature.

"They told me in the beginning," he confided to a mutual friend, "that Hartman had chalked the hat of this man Briggs. But to make sure, he went to see him last night. Now Hartman has disappeared, and I can't make head or tail out of the business. I trusted him implicitly, and now he's run away with my five thousand dollars."

And for years that was exactly what everybody connected with the Assembly firmly believed.

*Next Week: "THE PERSISTENCE OF PERCIVAL JAYNE."*



# Caste

By W. A. FRASER

*Author of "The Three Sapphires," "Thoroughbreds," etc.*

## CHAPTER XXIV—(continued).

### THE FREEDOM OF HUNSA.

AND Hunsu knew; his evil, swarthy face turned as green as the slime on the crocodile's forehead; his powerful, naked shoulders seemed to shrivel and shrink as though blood had ceased to flow through his veins. He put his two hands, clasped palm to palm, to his forehead in supplication, and begged that the ordeal might pass, that he might go by the bridge, or across the desert, or any way except by that pool of horrors.

Kassim again swept his hand toward the river, and his voice was horrible in its deadliness. "These children of the poor that are sacred to some of thy gods, infidel, have been fed; five goats have been allotted them as sacrifice and they wait for thee. They

serve Allah and not thy gods to-day. Go, murderer, for we wait; go, unless thou art not only a murderer, but a coward, for it is the only way. It was promised that no Pindari should wound or kill thee, dog, but they will help thee on thy way."

Hunsu at this drew himself up, his gorilla face seemed to fill out with resolve; he swept the vast throng of horsemen with his eyes, and realized that it was indeed true—there was nothing left but the pool, and the faint, faint chance that, powerful swimmer that he was, and with the knife, he might cross. Once his evil eyes rested on Kassim and involuntarily a hand twitched toward the dagger hilt; but at that instant he was pinioned, both arms, by a Pindari on either side. Then, standing rigid, he said:

"I am Hunsu, a Bagree, a servant of

*This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 14.*

Bhowanee: I am not afraid. May she bring the black plague upon all the Pindaris, who are dogs that worship a false god."

He strode toward the water, the soldiers, still a hand on either arm, marching beside him. On the clay bank he put his hands to his forehead, calling in a loud voice: "*Kali Mia*, receive me!" Then he plunged head first into the pool.

A cry of "Allah! Allah!" went up from ten thousand throats as the Bagree shot from view, smothered in the foam of the ruffled stream. And beyond the waters were churned by huge ghoulish forms that the blood of goats had gathered there. Five yards from the bank the ugly head of Hunsá appeared. A brown arm flashed once; in the fingers clutched a knife that seemed red with fresh blood. The water was lashed to foam; the tail of a giant *mugger* shot out and struck flat upon the surface of the river like the crack of a pistol. Again the head, and then the shoulders, of the swimmer were seen; and as if something dragged the torso below, two legs shot out from the water, gyrated spasmodically, and disappeared.

Barlow waited, his soul full of horror, but there was nothing more. Just a little lower down in the basin of the sluggish pool two bulbous protrusions above the water where some crocodile, either gorged or disappointed, floated lazily.

A ghastly silence reigned—no one spoke. Ten thousand eyes stared out across the pool.

Then the voice of Kassim was heard, solemn and deep, saying: "The covenant has been kept, and Allah has avenged the death of Amir Khan!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE QUALITY OF BREEDING.

COMMANDER KASSIM touched Barlow on the arm. "Captain Sahib, come with me. The death of that foul murderer does not take the weight off our hearts."

"He deserved it," Barlow declared.

Though filled with a sense of shuddering

horror, he was compelled involuntarily to admit that it had been a most just punishment; less brutal, even more impressive—almost taking on the aspect of a religious execution—than if the Bagree had been tortured to death, hacked to pieces by the *tutwars* of the outraged Pindaris. He had been executed with no evidence of passion in those who witnessed his death. And as to the subtlety of the commander in obtaining that confession, that, too, according to the ethics of Hindustan, was meritorious, not a thing to be condemned. Hunsá's animal cunning had been overmatched by the clear intellect of this wise soldier.

"We will walk back to the chamber of audience," Kassim said, "for now there are things to relate."

He spoke to a soldier to have his horse led behind, and as they walked he explained: "With us, *sahib*, as at the death of a Rana of Mewar, there is no interregnum; the dead wait upon the living, for it is dangerous that no one leads, even for an hour, men whose guard is their sword. So, Amir Khan waits yonder, where his body lies to be taken on his way to the arms of Allah in Paradise, they who have the welfare of our people at heart, have selected one to lead, and one and all, the jamadars and the hazaris, have decreed that I shall, unworthily, sit upon the throne that was Amir Khan's, though with us it is but the back of a horse. And we have taken under advisement the message thou brought. It has come in good time, for the Mahrattas are like wolves that have turned upon each other. Sindhia, Rao Holkar, both eaten by your armies, now fight among themselves, and suck like vampires the life blood of the Rajputs. And Holkar has become insane. But lately, retreating through Mewar, he went to the shrine of Krishna, and prostrating himself before his heathen image, reviled the god as the cause of his disaster. When the priests, aghast at the profanity, expostulated, he levied a fine of three hundred thousand rupees upon them, and when, fearing an outrage to the image these infidels call a god, they sent the idol to Udaipur, he waylaid the men who had taken it and slew them to a man."

"Your knowledge of affairs is great, chief," Barlow commented, for most of this was new to him.

"Yes, Captain Sahib, we Pindaris ride north, and east, and south, and west; we are almost as free as the eagles of the air, claiming that our home is where our cooking pots are. We do not trust to ramparts such as Fort Chitor where we may be cooped up and slain—such as the Rajputs have been three times in the three famed sacks of Chitor—but also, *sahib*, this is all wrong."

The chief halted and swept an arm in an encompassing embrace of the tent-studded plain.

"We are not a nation to muster an army, because now the cannon that belch forth a shower of death mow horsemen down like ripened grain. It was the dead chief's ambition, but it is wrong."

Barlow was struck with the wise logic of this tall, wide-browed warrior—it *was* wrong. Massed together, Pindaris and Bundoolas, assailed by the trained hordes of Mahrattas, with their French and Portuguese gunners and officers, would be slaughtered like sheep. And against the war-trained line regiments of the British foot soldiers, they would meet the same fate.

"You are right, Chief Kassim," Barlow declared. "Even if you cut in with the winning side, especially Sindhia, he would turn on you and devour you and your people."

"Yes, *sahib*. The trade of a Pindari, if I may call it so, has been that of loot in this land that has always been a land of strife for possession. I rode with Chitu as a jamadar when we swept through the Nizam's territory and put cities under a tribute of many *lakhs*, but that was a force of five thousand only, and we swooped the land like a great flock of hawks. But even at that Chitu, a wonderful chief, was killed by wild animals in the jungle when he was fleeing from disaster, almost alone."

They were now close to the palace, and as they entered, just within the great hall, Kassim said: "There will be nothing to say on thy part, Captain Sahib; the officers will come even now to the audience and it is all agreed upon. Thou wilt be given an

assurance to take back to the British, for by chance the others have put great confidence in me, even more in a matter of diplomacy than they had in the dead leader, may Allah rest his soul!"

And to the audience chamber—where he had sat oft—two long rows of minor chiefs at their head on a raised dais the Rajput raja, a Sessodia, one of the "Children of the Sun," as the flaming yellow gypsies sun above the dais attested—now came in twos and threes the wild-eyed, whiskered riders of the desert. They were lean, raw-boned, steel-muscled, tall, solemn-faced men, their eyes set deep in skin wrinkled from the scorch of sun on the white sands of the desert. And their eyes beneath the black brows were like a falcon's, predatory like those of birds of prey. And the air of freedom, of self-reliance, of independence, was in every look, in the firm, swinging stride, and erect set of the shoulders. They were men to swear by, or to fear; verily, men. And somehow one sharp look of appraisal, and one and all would have sworn by Allah that the *sahib* in the garb of an Afghan was a man.

As each one entered he strode to the center of the room, drew himself erect, facing the heavy curtain beyond which lay the dead chief, and raising a hand to brow, said in a deep voice: "Salaam, Amir Khan, and may the peace of Allah be upon thy spirit."

"Now, brothers," Kassim said, when the curtain entrance had ceased to be thrust to one side, "we will say what is to be said. One will stand guard just without, for this is a matter for the officers alone."

He took from his waist the silver chain and unlocked the iron box, brought forth the paper that Barlow had carried, and holding it aloft, said: "This is the message of brotherhood from the English raj. Are ye all agreed that it is acceptable to our people?"

"In the name of Allah we are," came as a sonorous chorus from one and all.

"And are ye agreed that it shall be said to the Captain Sahib, who is envoy from the Englay, that we ride in peace to his people, or ride not at all in war?"

"Allah! It is agreed," came the response

He turned to Barlow. "Captain Sahib, thou hast heard. The word of a Pindari, taken in the name of Allah, is inviolate. That is our answer to the message from the Englay chief. There is no writing to be given, for a Pindari deals in yea and nay. Is it to be considered, Captain Sahib? Is it a message to send that is worthy of men to men?"

"It is, Commander Kassim," Barlow answered.

"Then wait thou for the seal."

He raised his *tulwar* aloft—and as he did so the steel of every jamadar and hazari flashed upward—saying, "We Pindaris and Bundoolas who rode for Amir Khan, and now ride for Kassim, swear in the name of Allah, and on the beard of Mahomet, who is his Prophet, friendship to the Englay raj."

"By Allah and the beard of Mahomet, who is his Prophet, we make oath!" the deep voices boomed solemnly.

"It is all," Kassim said quietly. "I would make speech for a little with the captain."

As each officer passed toward the door he held out a hand and gripped the hand of the Englishman.

When they had gone Kassim said: "Go thou back, *sahib*, to the one who is to receive our answer, and let our promise be sent to the one who commands the Englay army and is even now at Tonk, in Mewar, for the purpose of putting the Mahrattas to the sword. Tell the *sahib* to strike and drive the accursed dogs from Mewar, and have no fear that the Pindaris will fall upon his flank. Even also our *tulwars* and our spears are ready for service so be it there is a reward in lands and gold."

The Pindari chief paced the marble floor twice, then with his eyes watching the effect of his words in the face of Barlow, he said: "Captain Sahib, it is of an affair of feeling I would speak now. It relates to the woman who has done us all a service, which but shows what a perception Amir Khan had; a glance and he knew a man for what he was. Therein was his power over the Pindaris. And it seems, which is rarer, that he knew what was in the heart of a woman, for the Gulab is one to rouse

in a man desire. And I, myself, years of hard riding and combat having taken me out of my colt days, wondered why the chief, being busy otherwise and a man of short temper, should entail labor in the way of claiming her regard. I may say, *sahib*, that a Pindari seizes upon what he wants and backs the claiming with his sword. But now it is all explained—the wise gentleness that really was in the heart of one so fierce as the chief—Allah rest his soul! What say thou, Captain Sahib?"

"Bootea is wonderful," Barlow answered fervidly. "She is like a Rajput princess."

Kassim coughed, stroked his black beard, adjusted the hilt of his *tulwar*, then coughed again.

"*Inshalla!* But thou hast said something." He turned to face Barlow more squarely. "Captain Sahib, the one who suffered the wrath of Allah to-day last night sent a salaam that I would listen to a matter of value. Not wishing to have the hated presence of the murderer in the room near where was Amir Khan I went below to where in a rock cell was this Hunsu. This is the matter he spoke of, no doubt hoping that it would make me more merciful; therefore, of a surety I think it is a lie. It is well known, *sahib*, that the Rana of Udaipur had a beautiful daughter, and Rajah Jaipur and Rajah Marwar both laid claim to her hand; even Sindhia wanted the princess, but, being a Mahratta—who are nothing in the way of breeding such as are the Children of the Sun—dust was thrown upon his beard. But the Rajputs fly to the sword over everything, and a terrible war ensued in which Udaipur was about ruined. Then one hyena, garbed as the minister of state, persuaded the cowardly rana to sacrifice Princess Kumari to save Udaipur."

"All this is known, *sahib*, and that she, with the courage of a Rajputni, drained the cup that contained the poison brewed from poppy leaves, and died with a smile on her lips, saying, 'Do not cry, mother. To give my life for my country is nothing.' That is the known story, *sahib*. But what Hunsu related was that Kumari did not die, but lives, and has the name of Bootea the Gulab."

The chief turned his eyes quizzically

upon the Englishman who muttered a half-smothered cry of surprise.

"It can't be—how could the princess be with men such?"

"Better there than sacrifice. Hunsa learned of this thing through listening beneath the wall of a tent at night while one Ajeet Singh spoke of it to the Gulab. It was that the rana got a *yogi*, a man skilled in magical things, either drugs or charms, and that Kumari was given a potion that caused her to lie dead for days; and when she was brought back to life of course she had to be removed from where Jaipur or Marwar might see or hear of this thing, because they would fly to the sword again."

Kassim ceased speaking, and his eyes carried a look of interrogation as if he were anxious for a sustaining of his half-faith in the story.

"It's all entirely possible," Barlow declared emphatically. "It's a common practice in India, this deceit as to death where a death is necessary. It could all be easily arranged, the rana yielding to pressure to save Mewar, and dreading the sin of being guilty of the death of his daughter. Even the Gulab is like a princess of the Sessodias—like a Rajputni of the highest caste."

"Indeed she is, Captain Sahib. The quality of breeding never lies."

"What discredits Hunsa's story," Barlow said thoughtfully, "is that the Gulab was in the protection of Ajeet Singh, who was but a *thakur* at best—really a protector of decoits."

"To save Kumari's life she had been given to the *yogi*, and he would act, not out of affection for the girl's standing as a princess, but to prevent discovery, blood-shed, and her life. It is also known that these ascetics—infidels, children of the devil—by charms, or drugs, or otherwise, can cause something like death for days—a trance, and the one who goes thus knows not who he was when he comes back," Kassim argued.

"Well," Barlow said, "it is a matter unsolvable, and of no importance, for the Gulab, Kumari or otherwise, is a princess, such as men fight and die for."

There was a little silence, Barlow carrying on in his mind this, the main interest,

so far as he was concerned, Bootea, as a woman appealing to the senses or to the subtlest mentality; she was the sweetest woman he had ever known.

There was a flicker of grim humor in Kassim's dark eyes. "Captain Sahib," he said, "that evil-faced Bagree had a curious, deep cunning, I believe. I'll swear now by the hilt of my *tulwar* that he made up the whole story for the purpose of having audience with me, and in his heart was a favor desired, for, as I was leaving, he asked that I would have his turban given back to him to wear on his going; he pleaded for it. Of course, *sahib*, a turban is an affair of caste, and I suppose he was feeling a disgrace in going forth without it. It appears the Gulab had taken it as an evidence that he had been killed, but when I sent a man for it she told him that the cloth was possessed of vermin, and she had burned it."

"But still, chief, though Hunsa had an animal cunning, yet he could not make up such a story—he had heard it somewhere."

Barlow felt his heart warm toward the grizzled old warrior as he, dropping the nebulous matter of Kumari, said: "And to think, Captain Sahib, that but for the Gulab we would have slain you as the murderer of Amir Khan. As a Patan, even if I had wished it, I could not have fended the *tulwars* from your body. And you were a brave man, such as a Pindari loves; rather than announce thyself as an Englay—the paper gone and thy mission failed—thou wouldst have stood up to death like a soldier."

He put his hand caressingly on Barlow's knee, adding: "By the beard of the Prophet thou art a man! But all this, *sahib*, is to this end—we hold the Gulab in reverence, as did Amir Khan, and if it is permitted, I would have her put in thy hands for her going. Those that were here in the camp with her fled at the first alarm, and my riders discovered to-day, too late, that they hid in an old mudwalled fort about three miles from here whilst my Pindaris scoured the country for them: then when my riders returned they escaped. So the Gulab is alone. I will send a guard of fifty horsemen, and they will ride with thee till thou turnest their horses' heads hom-

ward, and for the Gulab there will be a *tonga*, such as a Nawab might use, drawn by well-fed and well-shod horses. That, too, she may keep to the end of her journey and afterward, returning but the driver."

"My salaams to you, chief, for your goodness. To-morrow, if it pleases you, I will go with your promises to the British."

"It is a command, *sahib*—to-morrow. And may the peace of Allah be upon thee and thy house always!"

He held out his hand, and his large, dark eyes hovered lovingly over the face of the Englishman.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LIKE A BEAST OF THE JUNGLE.

CAPTAIN BARLOW walked along to the tent of Bootea to tell her of the arrangement that had been made for their leaving the camp, so that she might be ready. He could see in the girl's eyes the reflection of a dual mental struggle, an ineffable sweetness varied by a changing cloud of something that was apprehension or doubt.

"The *sahib* is a protector to Bootea," she said. "Sometimes I wondered if such men lived; yet I suppose a woman always has in her mind a vague conception that such an one might be. But always that, that is like a dream, is broken—one wakes."

Prosaically taking the matter in hand, Barlow said, "You would wish to go back to your people at Chunda—is it not so?"

The girl's eyes flashed to his face, and her brows wrinkled as if from pain. "Those who have fled will be on their way to Chunda, and they will tell of the slaying of Amir Khan. The Dewan will be pleased, and they will be given honor and rich reward; they will be allowed to return to Karowlee."

"Yes," Barlow interposed, "that Hunsa goes not back will simply be taken as an affair of war, that he was captured and killed; there will be nobody to relate that you revealed the plot. When you arrive there you also, will be showered with fa-

vors, and Ajeet Singh will owe his life to you. They will set him at liberty."

"And as to Nana Sahib?" Bootea asked, and there was pathetic dread in her eyes.

"What is it—you fear him?"

"Yes, *sahib*, he will claim Bootea. A Mahratta never keeps faith. There will be a fresh covenant, because he is like a beast of the jungle."

Barlow paced back and forth in the small confine of the tent, muttering: "It's hell!" He pictured the Gulab in the harem of Nana Sahib—in a gaudy prison chained to a serpent. To interfere on her behalf would be to sacrifice what came first—his duty as an officer of state, to what would be called, undoubtedly, an infatuation. Elizabeth would take it that way. Even his superiors would call it at least inexpedient, bad form. For a British officer to be interested or mixed up with a native woman, no matter how noble the impulse, would be a shattering of both official and personal caste.

"I won't allow that," he declared vehemently, shifting into words his mental traverse.

Bootea had followed with her eyes his struggle. Then she said: "The *sahib* has heard of the women of the Rajputs who, with smiles on their lips, faced death, who, when the time of the last danger came, were not afraid?"

"Yes, Gulab. But for you it is not that way. You have said that I am your protector. I will be."

There was a smile on the girl's lips as she raised her eyes to Barlow's. "It is not permitted, *sahib*; the gods have the matter in their lap. For a little—yes, perhaps. It is the time of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Omkar at Mandhatta, and Bootea will make the pilgrimage. At the shrine is the priest that told Bootea of her reincarnations, as I related to the *sahib*."

A curious superstitious chill struck with full force upon the heart of Barlow. Kasim's story of Kumari revived itself with startling remembrance. Was this the priest that, to save Kumari's sacrifice, had wafted her by occult or drug method from one embodied form into another, from Kumari to Bootea? It was so confusing, so overpower-

ering in its clutch that he did not speak of it.

The girl was adding: "It is on the *sahib's* way to Poona. There will be many from Karowlee at Mandhatta and I can return with them."

This seemed reasonable to Barlow; she would there be in the company of people not at war. And then, erratically, rebelliously, he felt a heart hunger; but he cursed this feeling as being vicious—it was. He smothered it, shoving it back into a niche of his mind, thinking he had locked it up, had turned a key in the door of the closet to hide the skeleton.

He temporized, saying, "Well, we'll see, Gulab. Perhaps at Mandhatta I could wait while you made an offering and a prayer to Omkar, and then you could journey on to Chunda." To himself he muttered in English: "By God! I'll not stand for that slimy brute Nana Sahib's possession of the girl—she's too good. I know enough now to denounce him."

In council with himself, standing, Captain Barlow firmly on his feet to face the realities, he realized the impossibility of being anything more to Bootea than just a *sahib* who had by fate been thrown into her path temporarily. And then, feeling the sway, the compelling force of a fascinating femininity he almost trembled for himself. Weaker *sahibs*—gad! He knew several, one a deputy commissioner. A beautiful little Kashmiri girl had nursed him through cholera when even his own servants had fled. The Kashmiri, who had the dainty, flowerlike sweetness of a Japanese maid, and practically the same code, had lived in his protection before this. After the nursing incident he had married her, with benefit of clergy, and the result had been hell, a living suicide, ostracism. A good officer, he still remained deputy commissioner, the highest official of the district, but the social excellence was wiped out—he was a pariah, an outcast. And the girl, who now could not remain just a native, could not attain to the dignity of a deputy commissioner *memsahib*.

Barlow knew several such. Of course, of drifters he knew also, the white inland beachcombers—men who had come out to

India to fill subordinate positions in the telegraph, or the railroad, or mills; and, as they sloughed off European caste, and possessed of the eternal longing for woman companionship, had married natives. Barlow shuddered at mentally rehearsed visions of the degradation. Thus everything logical was on that side of the ledger—all against the Gulab. On the other side was the fascination that the girl held for him.

Yes, at Mandhatta they would both sacrifice to the gods. Curiously, Elizabeth stood in the computation a cipher. Probably he would marry her, but the escapement from disaster, from wreck, would not be because of any moral sustaining from her, any invisible thread of love binding him to the daughter of the Resident. He knew that until he parted from Bootea at Mandhatta his soul would be torn by a strife that was foolish, contemptible, that should never have originated.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### INFIDELS COME TO WORSHIP.

AND next day when Barlow, sitting his horse, still riding as the Afghan, went forth, his going was somewhat like the departure of a Nawab. Chief Kassim and a dozen officers had clanked down the marble stairs from the palace with him and stood lined up at the gates raising their deep voices in full-throated salaams and blessings of Allah upon his head.

The horsemen of the guard, spears to boot leg, fierce-looking riders of the plain, were lined up four abreast. The *nakara* in the open court of the palace was thundering a farewell like a salute of light artillery.

The *tonga*, with Bootea, had gone on before with a guard of two outriders.

All that day they traveled to the south, on their left, against the eastern sky, the lofty peaks of the Vindhya mountains holding the gold of the sun till they looked like a continuous chain of gilded temples and tapering pagodas. For hours the road lay over hard basaltic rocks and white limestone; then again it was a sea of white sand they traversed with its blinding, eye-stinging glare.

At night, when they camped, Barlow had a fresh insight into the fine courtesy, the rough nobility that breeds into the bone of men who live by the sword and ride where they will. The Pindaris built their camp fires to one side, and two of them came to where the *sahib* had spread his blankets near the *tonga* and built a circle of smudge fires from chips of camel dung to keep away the flies. Then they went back to their fellows, and when Barlow had pulled the blanket over himself to sleep the clamor of voices where the horsemen sat was hushed.

And Bootea had been treated like a princess. At each village that they passed some would ride in and rejoin the cavalcade with fowl, and eggs, and fruit, and sugar cane, and fresh vegetables; and a mention of payment would only draw a frown, an exclamation of, "*Shookur!* These are but gifts from Allah. There has been more than payment that we have not cut off the *kotwal's* head, not even demanded a peep at the money chest. We are looked upon as men who confer favors."

It was the second day, one of the horses in the *tonga* showing lameness, or perhaps even weariness, for the yoke of the *tonga* across their backs did not ride with the ease of a man, the jamadar went into a village and came forth with his men leading two well-fed horses. Again when Barlow spoke of pay for them the jamadar answered, "We will leave these two with the unbelievers, and a message, in the name of Allah, that when we return if the horses we leave are not treated like those of the Sultan there will be throats slit. *Bismillah!* But it is a fair way of treating these unbelievers; they should be grateful."

The road ran through the large towns of Bhopal and Sehore, and at each place Jamadar Jemla explained to all and sundry of the officials that the Patan, meaning Barlow, was a trusted officer with Sindhia, and they were escorting a favorite for Sindhia's harem. It was a plausible story, and avoided interference, for while the Pindaris might be turned back if there was a force handy, to interfere with a lady of the king's harem might bring a horde of cutthroat Mahrattas down on them with a snipping off of official heads.

On the fourth day, and now they were on a good trunk road that ran to Indore, and branching to the left that crossed the Nerbudda River at Mandhatta, they were constantly passing pilgrims on their way to the temple of Omkar. In the affrighted eyes of the Hindus Barlow could read their dread of the Pindaris; they would cringe at the roadside and salaam, as fearful were they as if a wolf pack swept down the highway.

The jamadar would laugh in his deep throat, and twist his black mustache with forefinger and thumb, and call the curse of Mahomet upon these worshipers of stone images and foul gods. He loved to ride stirrup to stirrup with the Englishman, and Barlow found delight in the man's broad conception of life. The petty things seemed to have no resting place in his mind, unless perhaps as a matter for ridicule. The sweep of a country with free rein and a sharp sword, and always the hazard of loot or death, was an engrossing subject. Even the enemy who fought and bled and died, were men like themselves, by Allah, men! But the merchants, and the shopkeepers, and the moneylenders, who cringed and paid tribute when the Pindaris drove at them in a raid, were pigs, cowardly dogs who robbed the poor and gave only to the accursed Brahmins and their foul gods. He would dwell lovingly upon the feats of courage of the Rajputs, lamenting that such fine men should be excluded from heaven, dying as they did such glorious deaths, sword in hand, because of their mistaken infidelity: they were souls lost because of being led away from a true god, the one god—Allah—through false priests.

"Mark thou, *sahib*," Jemla said once, "I do not hold that it is a merit in the sight of Allah to slay such except there is need, but when it is a *jihad*, a question of the supremacy of a true god, Allah, or the *sahib's* god—which no doubt is one and the same—against the evil gods of destruction and depravity such as Shiva and Kali, then it is a merit to slay the children of evil. Mahomet did much to put this matter right," he declared. "He made good Musselmen of thousands who would otherwise have been cast into *jehannum*—hell—at times holding

the sword over their heads as argument. Therein Mahomet was a true prophet, a saver of souls rather than a destroyer of such."

By noon they were drawing toward Mandhatta, and when they came to where the road from Indore to Mandhatta joined the one they were traveling, there was an increase in the stream of pilgrims, and Barlow could see a look of uneasiness in the jamadar's eyes.

There was a grove of wild mango trees on the left, running from the road down to a stream that gurgled on its way from the hills to the Narbudda river, and Jemla said, "We might camp here, *sahib*, for there is both good water and firewood."

They could see, as they rested and ate, a party of Hindus down by the stream where there was a shrine to Krishna that nestled under a huge banyan that was like the roof of a cave from which dropped to earth to take root hundreds of slender shoots, like stalactites, and whose roots, creeping from the earth like giant worms, crawled on to lave in the stream. When they had finished eating, Jemla said, "That is a temple of the Preserver." Then he laughed a full-throated sneer. "*Allah hafiz!*—God protect us—give me a fine-edged *tulwar*—and mine own is not so dull—methinks yon grinning affair of stone would not preserve a dozen of these infidels had there been cause for anger."

"What do the pilgrims there, for they go, it would seem, to Omkar?" Barlow queried.

"There has been a death—perhaps it was even a year ago, and at the shrine of Krishna, especially this one that is on a water that is like a trickle of holy tears to the sacred Narbudda, *straddhas*—prayers for the dead—are said. Come, *sahib*, we will look upon this mummy, the only savor of grace about the infidel thing being that it perhaps brings to their hearts a restfulness, having the faith that they have helped the soul of the dead."

Barlow rose from where he sat and they went down to where a party of a dozen were engag in the service of an appeal to the god for rest for the soul of a dead relative. The devotees did not resent the appearance

of the two who were garbed as Moslem. The shrine was one of those, of which there are many in India, that, curiously enough, is sacred to both Hindus and followers of the Prophet. On a flat rock, laved by the stream, was an imprint of a foot, a legendary footprint of Krishna, perhaps left there as he crossed the stream to gambol with the milkmaids in the meadow beyond. And it was venerated by the Musselman because a disciple of Mahomet had attained to great sanctity by austerities up in the mountain behind, and had been buried there.

But Barlow was watching with deep interest the ceremonial form of the *straddha*. He saw the women place balls of rice, milk, and leaves of the *tulsi* plant in earthenware platters, then sprinkle over this flowers and kusa-grass. They added threads, plucked from their garments, to typify the presenting of the white death-sheet to the dead one, a priest all the time mumbling a prayer, at the end of the simple ceremony receiving a fee of five rupees.

As the two men turned back toward their camp Jemla chuckled, "Captain Sahib, thou seest now the weapon of the Brahmin. His loot of silver pieces was acquired with little effort and no strife. As to the rice balls the first jackal that catches their wind will have a filled stomach. It is something to be thought of in the way of regard for a long abiding in heaven that such foolish ones will not attain to it. The setting up of false gods, carved images, I was once told by a priest of thy faith, is sufficient to exclude such. It makes one's *tulwar* clatter in its scabbard to see such profanation in an approach to God."

Then Jemla spoke of the matter that had engendered the troubled look Barlow had observed. "The Captain Sahib has intimated that the one"—and he tipped his head toward the girl—"would proceed to the temple of Omkar to make offerings at the shrine?"

"Yes, she goes there."

"There will be a hundred thousand of these infidels at Mandhatta, and when they see fifty Pindaris, *tulwar* and spear and matchlock, there will be unrest; perhaps there will be altercation; they will fear that we ride in pillage."

"I was thinking of that," Barlow replied, "and it would be as well that you turn your faces homeward."

"We have received an order from our chief that our lives are at the disposal of the Captain Sahib, and we will drive into the heart of a Mahratta force if needs be, but if it is the *sahib's* command we will ride back from here," Jemla said.

"Yes, there is no need of a guard for the Gulab now—just that the *tonga* carries her as far as she wishes it," Barlow concurred.

"Indeed we are not needed, those infidels come to worship their heathen gods, not to combat men, and Mandhatta is but a matter of twelve *kos* now," Jemla affirmed.

When Captain Barlow, and Bootea in the *tonga*, drew out from the encampment to proceed on their way the Pindaris rode on in front, and then, at a command from Jemla, wheeled their horses into a continuous line facing the road, stirrup to stirrup, the horsemen sitting erect with their *tulwars* at salute. As Barlow passed a cry of "Salaam, aleikum! The protection of Allah be upon you," rippled down the line. Then the horsemen wheeled with their faces to the north. Jemla swept a hand to his forehead and from his deep throat welled a farewell, "Salaam, brother!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE DECEIT OF A WOMAN.

THE jamadar's tribute from man to man, one encased in a dark skin and one in a white, was akin to the tribulation that would not be driven from Barlow's mind over the Gulab, that in their case made the matter of a skin colorization the sinister. He rode in a brooding silence. And now the way was one of ascent toward the pass through the Vindhya mountains. A red, gravelly, undulating formation had given place to basaltic rocks. They passed from groups of *showa* trees, and left behind a wide, shallow stream, its bed dotted with pools fringed by great *showa* trees, and its banks lined by a thick growth of *jamun* and *karonda*. Thorny *jamun* thrust their spiked branches out over

the roadway, white with tufts of cotton torn by its thorns from bales, loose pressed, on their way to market in buffalo carts—"babul-the-thief," the natives called this acacia. Higher up a torchwood tree gleamed as if sprayed with gold, its limbs, lean and bare of foliage, holding at their extremities in wisplike fingers bright, yellow, solitary blooms. From a *tendu* tree a pair of droll little brown monkeys chattered and grimaced at the clattering cart.

A spotted owlet, disturbed by the driver's encouraging, "Pop-pop! Dih-dih! Ho-ho-ho! Children of jungle swine; brothers to buffalo!" addressed to the horses lagging in the climb, fluttered away with his silly little cackle.

These incidents of travel were almost unnoticed by Barlow. All up the climb the retrospect was with him, claiming his thoughts. Just that—all that was in evidence, a pigment in the skin, *caste*; and yet reacting away back to God's mandate against the union of the white and black. And verily a sin to be visited even unto the third and fourth generation, for the bar sinister would be upon his children; they would be half-castes with all of the opprobrium the name carried. Even the son of a king, the offspring of such a union would be spoken of in mess and drawing-room as a half-caste. The indelible sign would be upon him, the blue tint to the white moons in his finger nails. Barlow shuddered. Why contemplate the matter at all? It was impossible. Nana Sahib had named the barrier when he had spoken of *varna*, meaning color, as *caste*, a shirt of mail that protected from disaster.

Sometimes, as he dropped back past the *tonga* the face of Bootea would appear beneath the lifted curtain, and though on the lips would be a sweet, ravishing smile, the eyes were pathetic, full of heart hunger. Sometimes he vowed that he would put off the parting—dream on—carry her on to her people at Chundalee. Then he would realize that this was cowardice, a desire flooding his sense of nobility into a chasm of possible disaster—not fair to the girl, the animal mastery of male over female, the domination of sex. Beyond doubt, wrapped in his arms, not even the omnipotence of

the gods would take Bootea away from him. If there were less innate nobility in his avatar, if he were like men that were called redblooded men, yet lacking the finer sensibility, this might be; not a villainous rush, just drifting. That was it, the superlative excellence of the Gulab, the very quality that attracted, was the shield, the immaculate robe that clothed her and preserved her like a vestal virgin from such violation. Barlow could not word all these things; subconsciously they swayed him, like the magnetic needle, always toward the pole of right.

When they had topped the pass and descended into the valley of the Narbudda, clothed in arboreal beauty, passed from a forest of evergreen *sal* to giant teak trees with huge umbrellalike leaves that formed a canopy over the straight columnlike boles of eighty feet, and on amid topes of wild mango and wild date, down, down, to the lower levels where the dhak jungles gave way to feathery bamboo and plantain and waving grass, the sun, like a great ball of molten gold, was splashing its yellow sheen upon the waters of a stream that hurried south to Mother Narbudda.

There was a small village of Gonds, or Korkus, like a toy thing, the houses woven from split bamboo, nestling against the billowing hills.

"Here we will rest and eat," Barlow said to the Gulab.

"As the *sahib* wishes," she answered, and smiled at him like a child.

The huge medallion of gold had slid down in the west from the dome through which were shot great streamers of red and mauve, and a peacock perched high in a *sal* tree far up on the mountainside sent forth his strident cry of "*Miaou! Miaou!*" his evening salute to the god of warmth.

As the harsh call, like an evening *muez-zin*, died out, the sweet song of a sharra, in tones as pure as those of a nightingale's, broke the solemn hush of eventide.

Barlow turned his face to where the songster was perched in the top branches of a wild fig, and Bootea said in a low voice: "*Sahib*, it is said that the shama is a soul come back to earth to sing of love, that men may not grow harsh."

Soon a silver moon peeped over the walls of the Vindhya hills, and from the forests above the night wind, waking at the fleeing of the sun, whispered down through feathered *sal* trees carrying the scent of balsam and from a group of *salei* trees a sweet ungent, the perfume of the gum which is burned at the shrines of Hindu gods.

When they had eaten, Barlow said: "I wonder, Gulab, if this is like *kailas*, the heaven, those who have passed through many transitions and become holy, attain to."

"It is just heaven, my lord," she replied fervently.

"And to-morrow I will be plodding on through the sands and dust, and I'll be all alone. But you, little girl, you will be making your peace with Omkar and dreaming of the greater heaven."

"Yes, it will be that way; the *sahib* will not have the tribulation of protecting Bootea, and she will be in the protection of Omkar."

There was so much of pathetic resignation in the temper of the girl's voice, for it was half sigh, that Barlow shivered, as if the chilling mist of the valley had crept up to the foothills. Why had he not treated her as an alien—kept all interest in abeyance? His self recrimination was becoming a disease, an affliction.

He rose, muttering, "Damn! I'm like the young wasters that swarm up to London from Oxford and get splashed with the girls from the theaters—that's what I'm like."

As he strode over to where his horse was tethered, munching his ration of bran, Bootea followed him with her eyes, wondering why he had broken into English; perhaps he was chanting an evening prayer.

When Barlow came back he fell to wishing that they were at Mandhatta so that he would start on the rest of his journey in the morning. He dreaded the long evening with the girl. He could have sat there with Elizabeth, although their marriage hovered on the horizon, and talked of trivial things—of sport, of shooting, or damned the Executive sitting beneath the *punkah* in offices with windows all closed, far away in Calcutta. Or could have traversed, men

tally, leagues of sea and rehabilitated past scenes in London. It would be like talking to a brother officer. But with the Gulab, and the hush and perfume of the forest-clad hills, and the gentle glamor of moonlight, his senses would smother placid intellectuality; he would be like a toper with a bottle at his elbow mocking weak resolve.

Then the girl said something, a shy halting request that set his blood galloping. "*Sahib*, it is not far to Mandhatta—four *kos*, or perhaps it is five. Would it be unpermitted to suggest that we go there, for the moon is beautiful and the road is good."

"All right, girl!" and remembering that he had spoken in English, he added, "It will be expedient, for you will there find shelter."

"Yes, *sahib*, Guru Swami will be there, and I am known of him; and there are places where one may rest."

"I'll tell the driver to hitch up," Barlow declared, rising.

But she laid a detaining hand upon his arm. "*Sahib*, the sweetest thing in all Bootea's life was the time she rode on the horse with him. Then, too, the moon, that is the soul of Purusha, smiled upon her. Would it be permitted to Bootea just one more happiness, for to-morrow—to-morrow—"

The girl turned away, and seemed busy adjusting her gold-embroidered jacket.

"So you shall, Gulab," Barlow declared. And he, too, thought of the sweetness of that ride, where she lay like a confiding child in his arms; and also for him, too, was to-morrow—tomorrow; and for him, too, just one more foolish, useless happiness—just a sensuous burying of his face in flowers that on the morrow would have shriveled.

"I'll send the *tonga* on ahead," he declared, "and we'll just have that jolly old farewell ride together, girl—I'd love it."

Now she turned back to him, and her face was placid, soft, content, as though Mona Lisa had stepped out from the painted canvas, and, now embodied, was there listening to the sigh of the night wind through the feathered *sul* forest.

With an ejaculation of "*Bap, bap, bap!* *Smooz!*" and queer, gurgling clucking of

the throat, and a sonorous rumble from the wide, low wheels, the driver drove the *tonga* on into the moonlight. Barlow had saddled his horse and thrown his blanket loosely behind the saddle. The air was chilling, but his sheepskin coat would turn its cold breath. The blanket was for Bootea.

As he had done once before, his feet in stirrups, he reached down a hand and swung the girl up in front of him. Then he enveloped her in the blanket as she nestled against his chest, arms about his waist. Her warm body was like a draft of wine and he muttered, "My God! I shouldn't have done this!" But he knew that he would have had that ride if devils had jeered at him from the jungle that lined the road.

As the horse swung along in leisure walking stride, the girl seemed to have gone to sleep. Her cheek lay against Barlow's shoulder, and he could feel the pulsating throb of her heart. Once a sigh came from her lips, but it was like a breath of deep content. Barlow felt that he must talk to the girl; his senses were rampant; he was sitting like the lotus-eaters drinking in a deadly intoxication.

But it was Bootea who broke the silence as though she, too, felt herself slipping. She took from beneath her vestment a little bag of silk, and taking from it a ruby, she put it in Barlow's hand, saying: "Here is the 'Lamp of Akbar'; it protects and gives power."

"Where did you get this magnificent ruby, girl? It is of great value," Barlow said in amazement.

"Do you remember, *sahib*, when Bootea asked for the turban of Hunsu, the time it was stripped from his head, and the paper of message found hidden in it?"

"Yes, you said you would take it back to the Bagrees to show them that Hunsu was dead."

He could hear the Gulab chuckle. "That was but the deceit of a woman, *sahib*, the simple things a woman says to deceive a clever man. I knew that Hunsu had the ruby sewn in a corner of the turban, and when I had taken the stone I burned the turban in the fire, for it was very dirty

"Where did Hunsar get it?"

"When the Bagrees killed the jewel merchant, that time the *sahib* saved Bootea, she stole it from the other decoits, hiding it in his turban, because the Dewan wanted it."

"But I don't want the stone—I can't take it," Barlow expostulated.

"It is for a service, *sahib*. Nana Sahib will assuredly cause Ajeet to be put to death if Bootea does not return to his desire, but the *sahib* can buy his life with the ruby of great price."

"But if it were stolen would not Nana Sahib demand it, and then kill Ajeet?"

"No. It was not his ruby, and to obtain it he will set Ajeet free."

"I'll do that, Gulab," Barlow agreed, and the girl's hand pushed up from the folds of the blanket to caress his cheek, and her face nestled against his shoulder.

The fingers thrilled him, and, though he had made a solemn vow that he would ride like an anchorite, he bent his head and kissed her with a claiming warmth that caused her to cry out as if in misery.

Presently a whimsical fancy swayed the girl, and she said, "Ayub Alli!"

Barlow laughed, and answered, "*Bismillah!*"

"So, Afghan, riding thus, it is not disrespect, just that we be of different faith, Hindu and Musselman."

"If it were thus we'd not part at Mandhatta. And as to the faith, thou wouldst become a follower of the prophet."

"Yes, Bootea would. If she could go forever thus she would sacrifice entrance to *kailas*. But this is heaven; and perhaps Omkar, when I make the sacrifice—I mean offering—will listen to Bootea's prayers, and—and—"

"And what, Gulab?" Barlow asked, for the girl turned her face against his breast, and her voice had smothered.

Their thoughts were distracted by a din in front that shattered the solemn hush of the night. There was a thunderous beat of tom-toms, the shrill, rasping screech of conch-shells, and in intervals of subversion of instrumental clamor they could hear women's voices, high-pitched, singing the *sohailia*—song of joy. Loud cries of "Jae,

Jae, Omkar!" rose in a chorus from a hundred swelling throats.

At a turning around a huge banyan tree they saw the flickering flames of torches, and Barlow knew that plodding in front was a large body of pilgrims.

He quickened his horse's pace, drawing Bootea closer to hide her from curious eyes, and as he passed the Hindus he knew from their scowling faces and cries of "It is a Kafir—a barbarian!" that they took him for a Musselman, perhaps one of Sindhia's Arabs.

At the head of the procession, carried on a platform gayly decorated with gaudy cloths, borne on the shoulders of four men, was a figure of Ganesha. The obese four-armed, jovial son of Shiva, bobbing in the rhythmic stride of his carriers, seemed to nod his elephant head at the horseman approvingly, wishing him luck, as was the wont of Ganesha. The procession drove in upon Barlow's mind the thought that they were nearing Mandhatta. He realized it with a pang of reluctance. It seemed but a matter of just minutes since he had lifted Bootea to the saddle.

It had hurried the Gulab's mind, too, for at another turn where the road slid into the valley, bringing to their nostrils the soft perfume of kush-kush grass and the savor of jamun that grew luxuriantly on the banks of the Narbudda, the Gulab asked: "The *sahib* will marry the young *memsahib* who is at the city of the Peshwa?"

Barlow was startled. It was like a voice crying out in the night that shattered a blissful dream.

"Why do you ask that, Gulab?"

"Because it was said. And the Missie Baba's heart will be full of the *sahib*, for he is like a god."

"Is the Gulab jealous of the Missie Baba?" Barlow asked, mundanely, almost out of confusion.

"No, *sahib*, because—because one is not jealous of a princess; because that is to question the ways of the gods. If I had been an Englay and he loved me, and the Missie Baba claimed him, Bootea would kill her."

This was said with the simple conviction

of a child uttering a weird threat, but Barlow shivered.

"And now, Gulab," he persisted, "if you thought I loved you would you kill the Missie Baba?"

"No, *sahib*, because it is Bootea's fault. It can't be. It is permitted to Bootea to love the *sahib*, but at the shrine Omkar will take that sin and all the other sins away when she makes sacrifice—"

"What sacrifice, Gulab?"

"Such as we make to the gods, *sahib*."

Then something curious happened. The girl broke; she clung to Barlow convulsively. Sobs choked her.

He clasped her tight and laid his cheek against hers soothingly, and said, "Gulab, what is it? Don't go to the shrine of Omkar. Come with me to your people at Chunda, and if you do not want to remain with them I will have it arranged, through the Resident, that the British will reward you with protection. You have done the British raj a great service."

"No, *sahib*," The girl drew herself erect, so that her eyes gazed into Barlow's. They were luminous with an intensity of resolve. "Let Bootea speak what is in her heart, and be not offended. It is necessary. There is, at the end of the journey the place that is called *jahannam*—hell—for Bootea. The Nana Sahib waits like a tiger crouched by a pool at night for the coming of a stag to drink."

"The Resident will protect you against the Mahratta," Barlow declared.

"Bootea could do that," and in her small hand there gleamed in the moonlight the keen of her dagger blade. She thrust it back into her belt.

"What, then, do you fear, Gulab?" he queried.

"The *sahib*."

"Me, Gulab?"

"Yes, *khudawand*. To see you and not be permitted to hear your voice, nor feel your hand upon my face, would be worse than sacrifice. Bootea would rather die, slip off into death with the goodness, the sweetness of to-night upon her soul. There, where the *sahib* would be, Bootea's heart would be full of evil, the evil of craving for him.

"No, this is the end, and Bootea will make offerings of thanks—marigolds and a coconut to Omkar, and sprinkle attar upon his shrine in thankfulness for the joy of the *sahib*'s presence. It is said!" and the girl nestled down against Barlow's breast again as though she had gone to sleep in content.

But he groaned inwardly. There was something of dread in his heart, her resignation was so deep—suggesting an utter giving up, a helplessness. She had named sacrifice! The word rang ominously in his mind, beating at his fears. And yet, what she had said was philosophy, wise; a something that had been worded, perhaps differently, for a million years; the brave acceptance of Fate's decree—something that always triumphed over the weak longings of humans.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### INQUISITION.

NOW they could see the wide, silver ribbon of Mother Narbudda lying serene and placid in the moonlight, in the center of the river's wide flow the gloomy rock embrasures of Mandhatta Island. Where it towered upward in cliffs and coned hills the summit showed the flickering lights of many temples, and like the sing of a storm through giant trees there floated on the night wind the sound of many voices and the beating of drums and the imperious call of horns and conch-shells.

They came upon the *tonga* waiting by the roadside, and Barlow, thrusting back the covering from the girl's face said: "Now, Gulab, I will lift you down. We must find a place in the village beyond for you to rest to-night. I, too, will remain there, and in the morning we will make our salaams."

Then he drew her face to his and kissed her.

He slipped from the saddle and lifted the girl down, carrying her in his arms to the *tonga*.

As they neared the village that was situated on the flat land that swept back from the Narbudda in a wide plain, and nestled against the river bank, they were swept into

a crowd such as would be encountered on a trip to the Derby. The road was thronged with people, and the village itself, from which a bridge reached to the Island of Mandhatta, was a town in holiday attire, for to the Hindus the *mela* of Omkar was a union of festivity and devotion.

Both sides of the main street were lined with booths for the sale of everything—calicoes from Kalicut, where these prints first got their name; hammered Benares ware, gold-threaded cotton puggrees from Mawar, *tukwars* and *khandas* from Bhundi; in some of the little shops, bamboo structures that thrust an underlip out into the street; there was *mhowa* liquor, and *lulabis*, and *kabobs* of goat meat. Open spaces held tiny circuses—abnormal animals and performing goats, and a moonbear on a ring and strap.

The street was full of gossiping men and women dodging here and there. It was an outing where the *ryot*—farmer—had escaped from his croched stick of wood that was a plow, the village tradesman had left his shop, and the servant his service, to feel the joyousness of a holiday. Mendicants were in abundance, prowling in their ugliness like spirits in a nightmare, some naked, absolute, others with but a loin cloth, their lean, shriveled bodies smeared with ashes—sometimes the ashes of the dead—and cow dung, carrying on their arms and foreheads the red and white horizontal bars of Shiva, who was Omkar at Mandhatta.

These mendicants carried in their hands iron tongs, with loose clattering ring, or a yak's tail, or the three-ribbed horn of a black buck.

Some of the *yogis*, perhaps Goswamies that had come from the country where Eklinga was the tutelary deity, had their hair braided and woven around their foreheads, holding in its fold lotus seeds, and beneath the tiara of hair a crescent of white on their foreheads. A flowing yellow robe half hid their ash-smeared limbs. A tall Sannyasi—the most ascetic of sects—his lean yellow-robed form supported by a long staff at the end of which swung a yellow bag, strode solemnly along with eyes fixed on a book, the Bhagavad Gita, muttering,

"*Aum*, to the light of the earth, the divine light that illumines our souls. *Aum!*"

To Barlow it was like a grotesque pantomime with no directing hand. *Nautch* girls tripped along laughing and chatting, bracelets jingling, and tiny bells at their ankles tinkling musically. It depressed him. It was such a terrible juxtaposition of frivolity and the gloomed shadow of idol worship that lay just the bridge's span of the sullen Narbudda; the gloomy, broken scarps of the long since deserted forts that cut with jagged lines the moonlit sky; and beyond them again the many temples with their scowling Brahmin priests, and the shrine wherein the god of destruction, Omkar, sat athirst for sacrifice. He shivered as though the white mist that veiled the river crept into his marrow.

The Gulab seemed at home amongst these gathered ones. Two or three times she had bade the driver stop his creeping pace, and looking out from beneath the curtain, had questioned a man or woman. At last, as they were stopped by a wall of people watching the antics of some strolling players upon a platform, Bootea spoke to a stout woman who was pressed against the opening into the cart by the mob.

"*Lucker khan Bhaina, Bowree,*" the Gulab said in a low voice, and the woman's eyes took on a startled look, for it was a decoit password, and the Bowrees were a clan of decoits akin to the Bagrees. From the woman Bootea learned where she could find a good resting place with the family of a shopkeeper. There was no doubt about it, the Bowree woman assured her, for the *tonga* would impress him, and he was one who profited from the loot of the decoits.

The Gulab was given a place to sleep in the shopkeeper's house that extended back from his little shop. The driver was ordered to return in the morning to the Pindari camp. Barlow was for keeping the *tonga*, hoping that perhaps Bootea would change her mind and go on to Chunda, but the girl was firm in her determination to end it all at Mandhatta.

Before Barlow left her to seek some camping place in hut or *serai*, and food for himself and horse, the girl said: "If the *sahib* will delay his going to-morrow for a

little, Bootea will proceed early to the shrine to see the Swami—then she will return here, for she would want to see his face once more before the ending."

"I'll wait, Gulab," he acquiesced. "I'll be here at the tenth hour." He felt even then an unaccountable chill of their parting, for, many being about, he could not take her in his arms to kiss her; but their eyes spoke, and the girl's were luminous, and sweet with a look of hunger, of pathetic longing, of sublime trust.

As Barlow turned away, leading his horse, he muttered over and over, "Gad! It's incomprehensible that a *sahib* should feel this over a—yes, a native woman. It's damnable!"

He reviled himself, declaring that it was harder on the Gulab than on him—and he was actually suffering. It would be better if he swung to the saddle and fled from the misery that prolongation would make it more intense. And the girl's brave resignation in giving him up was wonderful—was so like her.

Then, at the sight of Mahratta *sowars*, who, it being Sindhia's territory, were a guard to watch the pilgrim throng, flashed him back to a sense of duty, his own mission. But it had not suffered because of Bootea—it had benefited through her. But for her the written message from the British would have been lost—stolen by Hunsas, and would have landed in Nana Sahib's hands. And he would have been slain as the Patan, killer of Amir Khan.

But the Gulab was right. From that time forward should she listen to him and go on to Poona, God alone knew where it would lead to—misery. It would be utter ruin morally, officially, in a caste way. Even in time passionate enthusiasm, engendered by her loveliness, dulled, would bring utter debasement, degradation of spirit, of man fiber. It was the wisdom of God that entailed upon the union of the white and dark skinned the bar sinister.

Until he slept, wrapped in his blankets on the sand beside his tethered horse, Barlow was tortured by this mental inquisition. Even in his troubled sleep there was a nightmare that waked him, panting and exhausted, and the remembrance was vivid—

Bootea lay beneath the mighty paws of a tiger and he was beating hopelessly at the snarling brute with a clubbed rifle.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### CASTE.

IN the morning Captain Barlow underwent a sartorial metamorphosis. He attained to the sanctity of a Hindu pilgrim by the purchase of a tight-angled pair of white trousers to replace the voluminous, baggy ones of a Patan, and a Rajput turban, blue, shot with gold. He shoved the Patan turban with its conical fex in his saddle bags, and wound the many yards of blue material in a rakish crisscross about his shapely head, running a fold or two beneath his chin. The Patan sheepskin coat was left with his horse.

When Bootea came at ten to where Barlow—who was now Jaswant Singh—paced up and down with the swagger of a Rajput in front of the *bunnia's* shop, she stood for a little, her eyes searching the crowd for her *sahib*. When he laughed and called softly, "Gulab," her eyes almost wept for joy; for not seeing him at once a dread that he had gone had chilled her.

"You see how easy it is, in a good cause, to change one's caste," he said.

"With you, *sahib*, yes, because you can also change your skin."

There it was again, the indestructible barrier, the pigmented badge. It drove the laugh from Barlow's lips.

"Why has the Afghan Musselman become a Hindu?" Bootea asked.

"I have no wish to anger these people who are on a holy pilgrimage by going into their temples as a Moslem."

"You are going to the shrine of Omkar?" the Gulab asked aghast.

"Are you—again?" Barlow parried.

"Yes, *sahib*, soon."

"I am going with you," Barlow declared.

Bootea expostulated with almost fierce eagerness; with a fervor that increased the uneasiness in Barlow's mind. He had a premonition of evil; dread hung on his soul—perhaps born of the dream of a tiger devouring the girl.

"The *sahib* still has the Akbar Lamp—the ruby?" the girl queried, presently.

"I have it safe," he answered, tapping his breast.

"If the *sahib* is not going to the shrine Bootea would desire that we go out beyond the village to a *mango tope* where there are none to observe, for she would like to make the final salaams in his arms—then nothing would matter."

"Perhaps we had better go anyway," Barlow said eagerly, "though I am going over to the shrine with you, for now, being a Hindu, I can pass as your brother. And there would not be opportunity."

The girl turned this over in her mind, then said: "No, we will not go to the grove, for Bootea can say farewell to the *sahib* in the cloister, where Swami Sarasvati has a cell for vigils."

Then, asking Barlow to wait, she went into the house, and soon returned clothed in spotless white muslin. He noticed that she had taken off all her ornaments, her jewelry. The bangle of gold that was a twisting snake with a ruby head, she pressed upon Barlow, saying: "When the *sahib* is married to the Englay will he give her this from me as a safeguard against evil, and that it may cause her to worship the *sahib* as a god, even as Bootea does?"

The simplicity, the genuine nobleness of this tribute of renunciation, hazed Barlow's eyes with a mist—almost tears. She was a strange combine of dramatic power and gentle sweetness.

"Now come, *sahib*," she said, "if you insist. It will not bring misery to Bootea, but to you."

Barlow strode along beside the girl steeped in ominous misgivings. Perhaps his presence at the temple would avert whatever it was, that, like an evil jinni, seemed to poison the air.

There was a moving throng of pilgrims that poured along in a joyous turbulent stream toward the bridge. No shadow of the dread god, Omkar, gloomed their spirits; they chatted and laughed. Of those who would make devotions the men were stripped to the waist, their limbs draped in spotless white. And the women, on their way to have their sins forgiven, were taking

final license—the *purdah* of the veil was almost forgotten, for this was permitted in the presence of the god. Even their beautifully formed bodies and limbs, the skin fresh anointed, gleaming like copper in the sunlight, showed entrancingly, voluptuously, with a new-born liberty.

Once, half way of the bridge, a man's voice rang out commandingly, calling backward, admonishing some one to hurry, crying, "It is the *kurban*!"

Barlow started. The *kurban* meant a human sacrifice. He looked at Bootea—he could have sworn her head had drooped, and that she shivered. The girl must have sensed his thoughts, for she turned her eyes up to his, but they held nothing of fear,

Beyond the bridge they passed across a lower level, jungle clad with delicate bamboos and dhak, and sweet-scented shrubs, clusters of gorgeous oleanders. The way was thronged with white-clothed figures that seemed like wraiths, ghosts drifting back to the cavern of the Destroyer.

Then they commenced the ascent, following the bed of a stream that had cut a chasm through back trap rock, leaving jagged cliffs. And the persistent jungle, ever encroaching on space, had outposts of champac and wild mango, their giant roots, like the arms of an octopus, holding anchorage in clefts of the rock. And from the limbs above floated down the scolding voices of *lungoor*, the black-faced, gray-whiskered monkeys, who rebuked the intrusion of the earth-dwellers below. Where the path lay over rocks it was worn smooth and slippery by naked feet, the feet of pilgrims for a thousand years. On the right the mouth of a deep cave had been walled up by masonry. Within, so the legend ran, the high priest of Mandhatta, centuries before, had imprisoned the goddess Kali to stop a pestilence, making vow to offer to Bhairava, her son, a yearly human sacrifice. Higher up, approaching the plateau where were the ruins of a thousand gorgeous shrines, both sides of the pathway were lined by mendicants who sat cross-legged, in front of them a little mat for the receipt of alms—cowries, pice, silver—the mendicants muttering incessantly, "*Jae, Jae, Omkar!*"—Victory to Omkar.

In front of the temple within which sat the god, was a conical black stone daubed with red, the Linga, the generative function of Siva, and before it, the symbol of reproduction, women made offering of coconuts, sweets, and garlands of flowers—generally marigolds—and prayed for the bestowal of a son. Even their postures, carried away as they were by desire, showing a complete abandon to the sex idea. A Brahmin priest sat cross-legged upon a stone platform repeating in a sing-song cadence prayers, and from somewhere beyond a deep-toned bell boomed out an admonishing call.

Holy water from the sacred Narbudda was poured into the two jugs each pilgrim carried and sealed by the Brahmins, who received, without thanks, stoically, as a matter of right, a tribute of silver.

Towering eighty feet above the temple spire was a cliff, and from a ledge near its top a white flag fluttered idly in the lazy wind. It was the death leap, the ledge from which the one of the human sacrifice to Omkar leaped, to crash in death beside the Linga.

Almost without words Barlow and the girl had toiled up the ascent, scarcely noticed by the throng; and now Bootea said, "*Sahib*, remain here. I go to speak to the high priest."

Barlow saw her speak into the open portal of one of the cloister chambers that surrounded the temple, then disappear within. After a time she came forth, and approaching him, said, "The priest would speak with thee, *sahib*, for because of many things I have told him who thou art, though mentioning not the nature of your mission, for that is not permitted."

Barlow's foreboding of evil was now a certainty as he strode forward.

The priest rose at the captain's entrance. He was a fine specimen of the true Brahmin, the intellectual cult, that through successive generations of mental sway and homage from the millions of untutored ones had become conscious of its power. Tall, spare of form, with wide, high forehead and full, expressive eyes, almost olive skin, Barlow felt that the Swami was quite unlike the begging *yogis* and mendicants; a man who was by the close alliance of his intel-

lect to the essence of created things a Sannyasi. Larger in his conceptions than the *yogis*, who misconstrued the Vedas and the law of Manu as imposing an association of filth—smeared ashes, and uncombed, uncleansed hair—as a symbol of piety and abnegation of spirit, a visible assertion that the body had passed from regard—that it, with its sensualities and ungodly cravings, had become subservient to the spirit, the soul.

Swami Sarasvati was austere; Barlow felt that he dwelt on a plane where the trivialities of life were but pestilential insects, to be endured stoically in a physical way, with the mind freed from their irritation grasping grander things; life was a wheel that revolved with the certainty of celestial bodies.

It was so curious, and yet so unailing, that Bootea, with her hyper-intuition, should have found, selected this spiritual tutor from the horde of *gurus*, *byragies*, and *yogis* that were connecting links between the tremendous pantheon of grotesque gods and the common people. Here she had come to an intellectual, though no doubt an ascetic, one possessed of fierce fervor in his ministry. There would be no swaying of that will force developed to the keen, flexible, unflawed temper of a Damascus blade.

Now the priest was saying in the *ast-pure*—Hindustani of the high-bred Brahmin: "The *sahib* confers honor upon Sri Swami Sarasvati by this visit, for the woman has related that he is of high caste among the Englay and has been trusted by the raj with a mission. That he comes in the garb of my people is consideration, for it avoids outrage to their feelings. I am glad to know that the Englay are so considerate."

"I came, Swami, because of regard for Bootea, for she is like a princess."

The priest shot a quick, searching look into the eyes of the speaker, and then he asked, "And what service would the *sahib* ask?"

The question caught Captain Barlow unaware; he had not formulated anything—it had all been nebulous, this dread. He hesitated, fearing to voice that which per-

haps did not exist in the minds of either the priest or Bootea.

The girl perceived the hesitancy, and spoke rapidly in a low voice to the priest.

"Captain Sahib," the Swami began, "I see that thy heart is inclined to the woman, and it is to be admired, for she is, as thou thinkest, like a flower of the forest. But also, Captain Sahib, thy heart is the heart of a soldier, of a brave man. The light of valor is in thine eyes, in thy face, and I would ask thee to be brave, and instead of being cast in sorrow because of what I am going to tell thee, thou must realize that it is for the good of the woman whose face is in thy heart. To-day she insures to her soul a place in *kailas*—the heaven of Siva—the abiding place of Brahm, the creator of all that is."

Barlow felt himself reel at this sudden confirmation of his fears—the blow. The cry "*kurban*" that he had heard on the bridge was a reality—a human sacrifice.

"God!" he cried in a voice of anguish. "It can't be. Young and beautiful and good, to die—it's wrong. I forbid such a cruel, wanton sacrifice of a sweet life."

The Swami, taking a step toward the door, swept his long, thin arm with a gesture that embraced the thousands beyond.

"Captain Sahib," he said solemnly, "if thou wert to raise thy voice in anger against this holy, soul-redeeming observance thou wouldst be torn to pieces; not even I could stop them if insult were offered to Omkar. And, besides, the Englay raj would call thee accursed for breeding hate in the hearts of the Hindus through the sacrilege of an insult to the high priest of the temple of Omkar. This is the territory of the Mahrattas, and the English have no authority here."

Barlow knew that he was helpless. Even if there were jurisdiction of the British, one against thousands of religious fanatics would avail nothing.

The priest saw the torture in the man's face, and continued: "The woman has told me much. Her heart is so with thee that it is already dead. Thou canst not take her to thy people, for the living hell is even worse than the hell beyond. If thou lovest the woman, glory in her release from

pain of spirit, from the degradation of being outcast—that she judges wisely, and there is not upon her soul the sin of taking her own life, for if she went with thee, proud and high-born as she is, it would come to that, *sahib*—thou knowest it. There are things that cannot be said by me concerning the woman, vows having been taken in the sanctity of a temple."

A figment of the rumor Barlow had heard that Bootea was Princess Kumari floated through his mind, but that did not matter; Bootea as Bootea was the sweetest woman he had ever known. It must be that she had filled his heart with love.

Again Bootea spoke in a low voice to the priest, and he said, "*Sahib*, I go forth for a little, for there are matters to arrange. I see yonder the sixteen Brahmins who, according to our rites, assemble when one is to pass at the shrine of Omkar to *kailas*."

His large, luminous eyes rested with tolerant placidity upon the face of this man whom he must consider, according to his tenets, as a creature antagonistic to the true gods, and said, in his soft, modulated voice: "Thou art young, *sahib*, and full of the life force which is essential to the things of the earth—thou art like the blossom of the *mhowa* tree that comes forth upon bare limbs before the maturity of its foliage; it is, then, as thou art, joyous in the freshness of awaking life. But life means eternity, the huge cycle that has been since Indra's birth. Life here is but a step, a transition from condition to condition, and the woman, by one act of sacrifice, attains to the blissful peace that many livings of re-incarnated body would not achieve. It is written in the law of Brahm that if one sacrifices his life, this phase of it, to Omkar, who is Siva, even though he had slain a Brahmin, he shall be forgiven, and sit in heaven with the *gandharvas*—angels. But it is also written that whosoever turns back in terror, each step that he takes shall be equivalent to the guilt of killing a Brahmin."

The priest's voice had risen in sonorous cadence until it was compelling.

Bootea trembled like a wind-wavered leaf.

To Barlow it was horrible, and mad in-

fatuation of a man prostrate before false gods, idols, a rabid materialism. That one, to fall crushed and bleeding from the dizzy height of the ledge of sacrifice upon a red-daubed stone representation of the repulsive emblem, could thus wipe out the deadly sin of a murder, was, even spiritually, impossible.

The priest, his soul submerged by the sophistry of his faith, passed from the gloomed cloister to the open sunlight.

And Barlow, conscious of his helplessness unless Bootea would now yield to his entreaties and foreswear the horrible sacrifice, turned to the girl, his face drawn and haggard, and his voice, when he spoke, vibrated tremulously from the pressure of his despair. He held out his arms, and Bootea threw herself against his breast and sobbed.

"Come back to Chunda with me, Gulab," Barlow pleaded.

"No, *sahib*," she said breathlessly, "it cannot be."

"But I love you, Bootea," he whispered.

"And Bootea loves the *sahib*," and her eyes, as she lifted her face, were wonderful. "There," she continued, "the *sahib* could not make the *nika*—marriage—with Bootea. Both our souls would be lost. But it is not forbidden—even if it were and was a sin, all sins will be forgiven Bootea before the sun sets—and if the *sahib* permits it Bootea will wed herself now to the one she loves. Hold me in your arms—tight, lest I die before it is time."

And Barlow pressed the girl to him, fiercely, crushing her almost, she raised her lips to his, and they both drank the long deep draft of love.

Then the Gulab drew from his arms and her face was radiant; a soft exultation illumined her eyes.

"That is all, *sahib*," she said. Bootea passes now, goes out to *kailas* in a happy dream. Go, *sahib*, and do not remain below, for this is so beautiful. You must ride forth in content."

She took him by the arm and gently led him to the door.

And from without he could hear a chorus of a thousand voices, its burden being, "The *kurban!*"

Barlow turned, one foot in the sunshine

and one in the cloister's gloom, and kissed Bootea. And she could feel his hot tears upon her cheek.

Once more he pleaded, "Renounce this dreadful sacrifice."

But the girl smiled up into his face, saying, "I die happily, husband. Perhaps Indra will permit Bootea to come back in spirit to the *sahib*."

The high priest strode to the entrance of the cloister, his eyes holding the abstraction of one moving in another world. He seemed oblivious of the Englishman's presence as he said:

"Come forth, ye who seek *kailas* through Omkar."

As Barlow staggered, almost blind, over the stony path from the cloister, he saw the group of sixteen Brahmins, their foreheads and arms carrying the white bars of Siva.

Then Bootea was led by the priest down to the cold, merciless stone—Linga—where she, at a word from the priest, knelt in obeisance, a barbaric outburst of music from horn and drum clamoring a salute.

When Bootea arose to her feet the priest tendered her some *mhawa* spirit in a coconut shell, but the girl, disdaining its stimulation, poured it in a libation upon the Linga.

From the amphitheater of the enclosing hills thirty thousand voices rose in one thundering chorus of "*Jae, Jae, Omkar!*" and "To Omkar the *kurban!*"

Many pressed forward, mad fanaticism in their eyes, and held out at arms' length toward the girl bracelets and ornaments to be touched by her fingers as an act of beneficence.

But Swami Sarasvati waved them back, and turning to Bootea, tendered her, with bowed head, the *pan supari*—betel nut in a leaf—as an admonition that the ceremony had ceased, and there was nothing left but the sacrifice.

As the girl with firm step turned to the path that led up through shrub and jungle growth to the ledge where fluttered the white flag, a tumult of approbation went up from the multitude at her brave devotion. Then a solemn hush enwrapped the bowl of the hills, and the eyes of the thou-

sands were fixed upon the jutting shell of rock.

A dirgelike cadence, a mighty gasp of "Ah, Kuda!" sounded as a slim figure, white robed, like a wraith, appeared on the ledge, and from her hand whirled down to the rocks below a coconut, cast in sacrifice; next a hand mirror, its glass shimmering flickers of gold from the sunlight.

For five seconds the white-clothed figure disappeared in the shrouding bushes; men

held their breath, and women gasped and clutched at their throats as if they choked.

Then they saw her again, arms high held as though she reached for God. And as the white-draped, slender form came hurtling through the air women swooned and men closed their eyes and shuddered.

An Englishman, clothed as a Hindu, lay prone on his face on the hillside sobbing, the dry leaves drinking in his tears, cursing himself for a sin that was not his.

THE END.



## J A Z Z

A CROWDED, noisy, over-heated room.

Where screaming cymbals crash and loud drums boom  
Above the broken rhythm and the moan  
Of muted violin and saxophone—

I close my eyes and seem to see  
A feast of savage revelry  
Under a blood-red tropic moon,  
Chanting a minor voodoo croon  
Of evil origin and sound.  
The jungle people circle round  
To the tom-tom's slow, hypnotic beat,  
Thin anklets tinkling shrill and sweet.  
Lewd, leering gods carved on the trees  
Sanction these forest mysteries  
In the champak's fragrant, rustling gloom  
Where shadows cast a purpling bloom.  
The jasmín buds are crushed to dust  
Neath trampling feet of love and lust—  
Flesh cries to flesh with fierce desire,  
And sex-lure surges ever higher,  
While over the brawl of the orgy comes  
The maddening, vicious throb of drums!

A crowded room where men and women dance—  
Music, insidious in its dissonance—  
And, dominating all this frenzied din,  
The wanton notes of horns and violin!

Mazie V. Caruthers.



# Vamp Till Ready

By SAMUEL G. CAMP

WITH the understanding that I am in no way connected with the management, why, I suppose you have by this time no doubt seen a certain show entitled "A Perfect Fool," and which for some time has been standing 'em up in front of one of our leading playhouses. Well, it's a nice show. But what I was going to say is this: just the minute I hear where the producers are going to send out some road companies, leave it to me to apply for the name part in the number one company, because it's a copper-riveted cinch that I'm there with positively all the qualifications.

And if they turn me down—though it don't seem possible—I'm gonna tip off a friend of mine, Eddie Bigelow, who admits that he is a well-known vaudeville artist; and believe me, Eddie gets the job. Do you get me?

Well, what I mean, when my good friend Tasker Wylie, the well-known impresario of boxers, gave me his word that Kid Cav-

eney—a boxer whose contract T. Wylie turns over to me outa pure friendship and at a terrific sacrifice at a time when I am down and seven-eighths out on account of an overindulgence in the music publishin' business—when Tasker Wylie gives me his word that this Kid Caveney is nothing less than a second Georges Carpentier, why, I've got the notion that he must have meant something more than just that the Kid was about Georges's size, classing as a light-heavy, and that the way the Kid handles himself in the ring is a dead ringer for the great Frenchman. and that, like Georges. Mr. Caveney packs a right which sure is the old TNT and no mistake and matters of that sort.

Not that I want you to get me as saying that T. Wylie was keeping something back from me. No, nothing like that. But be that as it may, you probably remember how when the fascinating Georges comes over here for the purpose of taking that two-hundred-thousand-dollar slap from our

Jack, why, the dames simply fall for him in mass formation, as you might say. And likewise you no doubt recollect how the sob-sisterhood wipes the dust off the good old Greek-god stuff and gives it another run for the money; and how—but no doubt you get the idea. Georges certainly goaled 'em, and that's a historical fact.

Well, it is likewise a matter of history that the great French athlete had nothing on Kid Caveney in the respects to which I have just alluded. For as regards the effeminate sex, what a knockout he was! Why, for a fact, Kid Caveney had these beautiful cake eaters featured in the collar ads lookin' like the leadin' male characters in the comic strips; and so you can figure for yourself exactly how many chances the slightly fairer sex had with the Kid. The answer is not a chance.

And another thing. As you no doubt know, M. Carpentier is popularly supposed to have a type of mind, so to say, which ain't to be mentioned in the same breath with the sort of so-called brain which is usually to be found growin' wild among the average run of box-fighters.

That's to say, if we are to believe the advertisements, why, Georges is quite an accomplished actor, and reads only the best of literature—maybe writes a mean poem, for all I know—and allowin' for the difference in climate between here and Paris, why, his manners are simply flawless and all this and that.

Well, believe it or not, in these respects also the Kid yields not an inch to the beautiful and likewise accomplished Georges. Why, it's a fact that the Kid has got these terrible roughnecks with which he is forced to associate in the glove-pushin' trade looking like nothing so much as so many sub-normal morons, and no one is freer to admit it than Mr. Caveney himself. And as an actor—well, take it from the Kid, all he needs is a chance and right away he'll have Doug, Wallie and the rest of 'em looking like a bunch of rank outsiders. So, what with one thing and another, you can believe me when I say that piloting Mr. Caveney was one sweet job.

And just to prove it, and at the same time make a tall story short, I'm going to

give you a chance to listen in on a little bag-punching bee which took place between me and Eddie Bigelow some eighteen months after Kid Caveney came under my skillful management. You probably remember I already mentioned Eddie, and, as I said then, there is no doubt in the world that Eddie is one of our leading vaudevillains, because he himself admits it. Anyway, one day as I'm leaving the building in which my well-appointed general headquarters are located, why, there, parked just outside the door and watchin' the world go by, is Eddie Bigelow.

I'm busier than a flea at a dog show, but not having seen him in quite some time, of course I have to stop and find out how things are going with Eddie. And right away Eddie remarks that I'm looking kind of worried.

"Worried?" I says. "Where do you get that idea? Why, as a matter of fact, I got no more to worry about than a baseball umpire in a pop-bottle factory."

"What seems to be the trouble?" asks Eddie. "Kid Caveney hitting the high spots or something?"

"You guessed it," I says. "Or words to that effect. Listen. If you've ever seen him, you don't need to be told that Kid Caveney has got Who's This Adonis lookin' like a stage tramp."

"I always said," says Eddie, "that if that bird ever went into the pictures he'd be a bigger riot than anything that was ever pulled in Dublin."

"By an odd coincidence," I says, "that's practically what the Kid has always said himself. And it seems now there's still a third person that has the same identical idea, and, what's more, she ain't hesitated to tell him so. And seein' she's in the business herself, why, this time it means something. I'll say it does."

"Who do you mean?" he asks.

"Muriel Morton," I says.

"You don't mean Muriel Morton?" he says.

"You heard me," I says.

"But, Muriel Morton," he says, "why, she's a regular headliner!"

"Don't I know it?" I comes back. "But what of that? Believe me, in this kind of

matter, Mr. Caveney is no respecter of persons, so to say. High, low, jack and the game, I'll say they simply can't resist him. Anyway, this Muriel Morton is simply wild over the Kid, and the Kid is simply wild over her, and—well, if you count me in, why, that makes three of us that's simply wild, and that's a fact."

"But what's the idea?" asks Eddie. "Is the Kid gonna quit the boxing game?"

"In a nutshell," I tells him, "the idea is this: under the influence of the celebrated Muriel, who has no use for this low-browed glove-pushin' business, the Kid has already notified me that as soon as he has smacked One Round Harris for the customary row of shanties, and which comes to pass three weeks from to-night, why, he's immediately gonna start knocking 'em dead in the movies.

"No," says Eddie.

"Yes," I says.

"That's tough," says Eddie, thereby provin' that he has a wonderful grasp of the situation.

"You'll know how tough it is," I says, "when I tell you that if the Kid beats One Round Harris, which is a dead and buried cinch, Gene Richards, the world-famous fight promoter, has given me his word to three weeks later put on the Kid with no less than Battling Rothstein, who as you well know is the light-heavy titleholder. And between you and me, Eddie, Battling Rothstein has got the same chance with the Kid that I got with Dempsey—no more, no less. In other words, if it wasn't for one thing and another, why, in six weeks time I'd be managin' a champion—and you know what that means."

"H-m," says Eddie. "So that's the scenario."

"Take it or leave it," I says.

Well, at that, for a short spell Eddie gives an imitation of a real deep thinker doing his stuff. Then finally he says:

"Listen. You gonna be busy this afternoon? Because if you ain't, I want to have you come round and get my act at the Regal."

"Well," I says, "of course I'm busy, but—"

"Because," Eddie goes on, "it may

mean quite a lot to you to see this act of mine, and then again maybe it won't mean nothing. That's for you to say—after you have seen the act."

"What kind of an act is it?" I asks him.

"Wait and see," he says. "Except I might say we're billed as Bigelow and Morgan. And listen. As you go in, don't take a program. I want you to see this act without knowing nothing about it beforehand. Because if you know what's coming off, why, it might spoil things."

"Have it your own way," I says. "But, say, at precisely what time this afternoon is the plot due to thicken? When do you go on?"

"Be sure and be there by three," he tells me. "I want you to see the way we open up. Because, in a way, that's the punch of the piece."

"O. K.," I says. "And if I don't show up, why, you'll know it's because I died of curiosity in the meantime."

So, after agreeing to meet Eddie at his hotel about four o'clock, I tear myself away, and—well, shortly before three, as advertised, I arrive at the Regal, which I don't know whether you'd call it a second or third rate vaudeville house, but it certainly ain't a first-class one.

On the way in I skillfully sidestep the program which is aimed at me, and after I get to my seat, why, I'm simply on pins and needles to see what's coming off. Because I pride myself on the fact that I got at the least average intelligence, and so of course I knew that Eddie's wanting me to lamp this act of his was in some way connected up with my troubles with Kid Caveney, though what the connection was, or how there could be one, anyway, why, that was something which was beyond me.

Well, I had something to be thankful for, anyway, because I got there just in time to see the bitter end of a trained animal act. And if there's one thing more than another which I personally like to see, believe me it's the end of a perfect trained animal act. Then, when the curtain goes up for the next turn for the worse, why, it seems there's nobody on the stage, which represents in a terrible feeble manner what the society novels calls a drawing-room.

Anyway, that's the idea I seem to get, though I don't know why. Because while drawing-rooms is something which I personally only read about, still, I'll say them stage settings come as near representing one as ten cents' worth of ice comes to representin' the Arctic regions.

However, the agony is soon over. Right away there bursts into view a vision which—well, believe it or not, if Gloria Pickford, Mary Swanson and Betty Stewart had been among those present, why, they'd have immediately rose up and left the place in a rage of jealousy. Because one and all, not to say bar none, this dame has got the rest of her esteemed contemporaries in the unmanly sex faded like a bathin' suit in September, and you can take my word for that. Why—but no doubt you get the idea. She certainly is one blue-ribbon looker and no mistake.

And believe me, I'm strongly tempted to borrow a program, just to see whether this eye-soothin' damsel is the Morgan of Bigelow and Morgan. You remember Eddie had said his partner's name was Morgan. But I play the game fair. After the world's champion looker has warbled one of the popular songs of the day in a kind of deep, chesty contralto, I believe it's called—and while I'm no musical critic, nevertheless I'm prepared to state that long before this cover illustrator's dream breaks into the Metropolitan she'll be doing her stuff in the angel choir—well, then Eddie enters smiling and caparisoned in a dress suit which looks like the kind which is mostly wore by trapeze artists, and of course that settles it.

Likewise I begin to get a kind of hazy idea as to what Eddie is driving at. But I'll say I didn't know the half of it. Because the big smash of the piece for me was when at the close of the act—which certainly went big—the pulse-quickenin' Miss Morgan, while taking her third curtain call, removes a wonderful blond wig, thereby bringing to view what would have been a bumper crop of raven locks only for a prison haircut, and proceeds to thank the customers in one of them bass voices that's usually associated with train announcers, heavy tragedians, and the like.

Yes, that was the punch of the piece for me—when I discover that I've tumbled for a female impersonator. But what a female impersonator!

And I said as much to Eddie when a bit later we got together at the hotel. Morgan wasn't with him.

"Where's Morgan?" I asks him.

"Oh, he's somewhere," Eddie says. "We don't run around much together. We got different friends."

"Well," I says, "I'd like to meet him. Because while no doubt, as the feller says, genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains, instead of, as you might say, faking janes, nevertheless I'll say he's a genius, and I'd like to tell him so."

"So you fell for him?" grins Eddie.

"Worse than that," I admits. "I fell for her!"

"I thought you would," he says. "So would the Kid."

"Eh?" I says.

"So would Kid Caveney," says Eddie.

"Once the Kid sees Morgan like you seen him this afternoon, without knowin' it's a female impersonator working, believe me he'll forget Muriel like a flash; because while Muriel Morton is a wonderful screen actress, why, you gotta admit that as a looker she ain't so much. And it wouldn't make no difference if she was. Because this Morgan is good—what? You said it. And listen—that ain't all of it. He's good anywhere.

"What I mean is, he don't need any footlights between him and the audience to keep up the deception, so to say. He's good anywhere. Not one person in a thousand would guess he's anything but what he looks like—and that's like a dame that's got Sol Bloomfield's little pets lookin' like so many Fiji Islanders. Am I right? You know it.

"And so all we gotta do," he says, "is be a little careful about where and when the Kid meets Morgan—maybe the Kid might notice something in broad daylight, though what with the way all the janes are makin' up nowadays I doubt if he would even then—and it 'll be the easiest thing in the world for Morgan to keep stringin' the Kid along until after the Kid has won

the championship. Then we'll have to wise him some way."

"As we used to say in the popular song-hit business," I observes, "vamp till ready."

"And once the Kid gets Muriel out of his system," says Eddie, "why, no doubt he'll give up this idea of canning the fight game."

"No doubt," I agrees. "For the time being, anyway. But listen. Of course you are a friend of mine, Eddie, but somehow I got a notion that you ain't proposing this just outa pure friendship, hey? And so—"

"I'll tell you," he says. "You saw our act just now, and you know it's the goods. Morgan's costumes are O. K., but he oughta have more of 'em, and believe me you got no idea of the cost of them elaborate gowns which he has to wear. It's somethin' fierce. But our scenery is rotten, and that dress suit I wear—say, it looks like one of them trick circus soup-and-fish rigs which falls apart when you pull a string, hey? Maybe you noticed it. Anyway, all that's keeping us off the big time, and from there into a production, is lack of money, and that's straight. So we'll put this thing through for you for say a thousand berries, and—"

"Wait a minute," I cuts in. "Who d'ye think you're talkin' to—the king of the bootleggers?"

"And expenses," he says.

"Lemme give you a tip, Eddie," I says. "The next time you're pinched, plead insanity. They'll never be able to hold you."

"Listen," he says. "For the Virginia Kid thing you and the Kid get an even twelve thousand bucks for your end. The Soldier Simms scrap pays you ten thousand. The Two Punch Costigan brawl pays you another twelve grand. For the Kayo Curtis fight—"

"All right, all right," I gives in. "As a student of history, Eddie, I'll say you got Woodrow Wilson in the fourth grade and not going so good at that. We'll call it a deal."

And I guess you don't need any better proof than that of the way I was up against it—my falling for this harebrained scheme of Eddie's. But if I wasn't actually goin'

down for the third time why, I certainly had all the sensations, and so it was just another case of the celebrated drownin' man clutchin' for the well-known straw. I'll say so. And we put it across.

However, if I was to go into all the details from here on, why, there would be no end to it, and so the best I can do is dwell briefly on the high spots, as you might say.

One look at the breath-takin' Miss Gladys Delano—which is the alias Eddie suggests for Morgan to use while doing his stuff with the Kid—one look at Gladys, and Mr. Caveney immediately goes overboard, and Muriel and the movies are no more things of the past than hoopskirts, high bicycles and brass rails. Because for one thing, the beautiful—but false—Gladys has been carefully coached to make it plain to the Kid where one of the main reasons why she's crazy over him is on account of what he actually is—one of the very best athletes then performing before the public, and not as any would-be movie hero or the like.

Well, the time for the One Round Harris quarrel came and went—leavin' Mr. Harris more or less comfortably located in a strictly modern and up-to-date hospital and doin' as well as could be expected. It took a couple of competent surgeons two weeks to undo what the Kid did in a few short minutes, once more provin' the theory that it is much easier to tear down than to build up. But as Mr. Harris would say, what of that? Hey?

Now, as you remember, our chance of getting a shot at the champion, Battling Rothstein, depended on the outcome of this imbroglio with One Round Harris. So immediately after the Kid sends Mr. Harris to the ash heap, why, Promoter Gene Richards is as good as his word, and the customary arrangements are promptly made for the Kid to meet Battling Rothstein three weeks later—for the title.

So at a hasty glance you might think everything was jake—or O. K., as you might say. But not so.

Anyway, it's an undeniable fact that durin' that three weeks I smash all existin' records for indoor and outdoor worryin'. It ain't the Battling Rothstein fuss which has me as nervous as a corn in a popper, be-

cause I am positive of that, just as sure as one of the main causes of baldness is sittin' in the front row, the Kid will beat the Battler in a manner as hollow as a summer hotel in January.

And likewise it ain't the sweet bill of expenses which this cheap actor, Morgan, is running up, either, and which he claims is necessary to support the distracting but phony Gladys Delano in the style to which she is accustomed—such as livin' at a swell hotel, and at least one new gown the week, and all this and that, though of course maybe it's necessary in order to keep up the deception, as Eddie and Morgan both claims.

No, it ain't either of these things that's got me walking the floor nights, startin' at every little sound like I'd been shot, and exhibitin' other equally alarmin' symptoms of being about an even one inch this side of nervous prostration.

But I'll tell you what it is. The fact of the matter is, the Kid's got a temper like a nervous wildcat, and when he finds out the way we have handed him the work—well, what then, hey? Because believe me, that boy swings a mean bare knuckle! Yes, right there, ladies and gentlemen, is the arsenic in the pie crust.

However, just about then I wasn't the only one whose favorite hobby, as you might say, was viewin' the situation with alarm. We simply got to have a showdown with the Kid right away after the Rothstein battle, and as the fatal time draws near, friend Eddie, who had introduced the bewitching but synthetic Gladys to the Kid, and had also played quite a prominent part in the subsequent proceedings—well, Eddie likewise begins to feel himself slipping.

So me and Eddie get together a number of times and discuss the matter with much care and considerable earnestness, and we finally come to the conclusion that there's only one way out of it. Eddie and Morgan's engagement at the Regal had come to an end only a day or so after we started to frame the Kid, and they hadn't tried to get another booking because Mr. Caveney might accidentally drift into the place where Morgan was doing his stuff—in which case the beans would have been spilled

right there and then. Otherwise, if Morgan had been working somewhere, why, we could have steered the Kid to the place and let him find out for himself—with what results it is difficult to say, and then again it ain't so difficult.

But the way things were, why, it looks like the only way is for all of us to get together in my place of business the morning after the Rothstein battle, and come clean to the Kid, by no means omittin' to tell Mr. Caveney how it was all for his own good, and so forth, and if the Kid burns up and starts to wreck the joint, includin' his three earnest well-wishers, Mr. Bigelow, Mr. Morgan and myself—well, there's always a cop handy on the corner, and no doubt he'll be able to quell the disturbance before it amounts to anything more than a couple of hospital cases or the like.

At least let us hope so!

So, for want of a better, that was the plan we agreed on—though, believe me, had it been possible, I would have much preferred to handle the matter by radio from Moscow.

Well, durin' my long and useful career I can remember passin' quite a number of highly enjoyable evenings at Mrs. Madison's Square Garden, but the eve on which Kid Caveney met Battling Rothstein for the light-heavy championship of this man's world ain't one of 'em. Far from it. As you know, I had rated Battling Rothstein as nothing more or less than a push-over for Mr. Georges Carpentier, 2nd, alias Kid Caveney, and the Battler would have been all of that if—well, if the Kid had not sprung a complete surprise on the hundreds of ring worms which had foregathered to view the obsequies, not to mention myself. You see, always before this the Kid had gone after his man right from the openin' chime, and had usually succeeded in knocking the opposing candidate slantwise before the victim found out whether he'd been struck by a resemblance or a cyclone, as you might say.

With a few scattering exceptions, none of the kid's scraps had gone more than five stanzas at the most—with the Kid right in there tryin' all the time. But this time it's

different. Despite the Kid having seemingly every inducement to do his prettiest—among others the fact that Miss Gladys Delano, lookin' like an extra-super-special-feature produced at staggerin' expense by the combined beauty parlors of New York, London and Paris, is viewing the proceedings from a ringside chair—in spite of everything, apparently Mr. Caveney takes as much interest in the affair as I take in the annual rainfall at Jackson's Corners, New York.

Which is to say, in spite of everything I and the disgusted mob of fight addicts can think of to call him—and believe me, we're good at it—the Kid does anything but fight and nothing but dog it.

For a fact, there's more fight in two fingers of grape juice than there is in Mr. Caveney's entire frame. Anyway, he does nothing but cover up, and as an uninnocent bystander I seem to grasp the idea that Mr. Caveney is chiefly concerned over the fact that there is a bare possibility that one of the two million boxin' gloves which Battling Rothstein is hurlin' at him may come in contact with his classical features.

And as a result the Battler has soon piled up more points than Rockefeller has pesos, and the Kid's only chance of winning is by a knockout—which if you ask me, I got the same chance of knocking out a living as a toe dancer. Fine business—what?

But then something happens. You understand, the Kid is a master hand at covering up—I'll say he proved it—and though to the tyro it might have looked as if the Battler had hit the Kid with everything but the Marquis of Queensberry's title, why, as a matter of fact, the Kid is only slightly the worse for wear.

And whether the Kid takes exception to some remark which Rothstein addresses to him, or whether one of the Battler's blows stings the Kid out of his trance—well, I don't know—but, anyway, all of a sudden, that temper of the Kid's, which I believe I have mentioned, goes glimmering, and—man!

Was there a difference? There was. Such a difference that two short minutes later the official referee is holdin' up the Kid's hand

in the pose made famous by the Statue of Liberty, and—well, to all intents and purposes, that's that.

But though all's ended well, somehow I can't seem to work up a whole lot of enthusiasm over the Kid's victory. You know what I mean.

Well, we're still in the dressing room, and the new champ has hardly got into his street clothes when he asks me for his end of the money.

I think it's kind of funny, because he'd never done it before; but I'd collected before the show, and so I gave it to him. Then I take a long breath and tell him I want to see him at the office next morning at ten o'clock.

"What's doing?" he asks.

"That depends," I says. "Maybe quite a lot, and then again maybe not so much. I'm no clairvoyant, but I certainly do wish I was. Anyway, I want you to be there."

He said he would.

Well, next morning it lacks about twenty minutes of the zero hour, and I'm sittin' there alone in the office waiting for the rest of the cast to show up, and maybe because of not eating much breakfast on account of somehow having no appetite, why, I am experiencing a kinda gone feeling in the mid-section, when in crashes Eddie Bigelow!

"Sweet Adeline!" I says. "Now what has happened?"

Because Eddie is all shot—that's plain to be seen.

"Listen," he says, gettin' right to the point. "There's something I gotta tell you. 'About a year ago I'm doin' a single in a three-a-day joint down South. Well, there's a girl on the same bill that looks like Mary Pickford plus a million dollars, but her stuff is no good, and she ain't getting by. She's billed as Gladys Delano, the Contralto Queen, but her voice sounds more like a sort of cross between a barber-shop barytone and a bunch of static."

"Gladys Delano!" I gasps. And right then I get the idea that maybe it's something more than a mere coincidence that so far I've never yet seen this so-called Morgan except in costume, as you might say. "Why—"

"Wait," says Eddie. "The best thing Gladys does is a couple of imitations of famous actors, in one of which she uses a deep bass voice. That's what gives me the idea—see? As a contralto queen she's a two-spot—but what a looker! And *billed as a female impersonator*—get me? Why, she'd be a riot! And believe me, that's something that's never been done before—female impersonating an impersonator of females, as you might say, and makin' 'em like it! The triple-cross—what?"

"Well, I sell her the idea, and we work up an act, and of course there's a lot of difficulties of one kind and another, but we've discounted beforehand most of the stuff we're liable to go up against, and we get away with it easier than you think."

"That is to say, even the profession ain't wise to the stuff we're pullin'." Then Gladys agrees to work this game on Kid Caveney, on account we certainly need the money, and in a month more we would of been on Broadway if—"

He hesitates and glances toward the door like as if he is calculating the distance.

"If what?" I demands.

"If Gladys hadn't gone crazy over the Kid and married him," he comes out with it.

I'm outa my chair like a shot.

"Sweet sister!" I yells. "You mean—"

"She leaves me a note last night," he says. "Fixes it so's I won't get it till this morning. Gladys and the Kid got married a week ago. Then, last night, soon as you paid off the Kid—anyway, that's what I figure they're waiting for—they leave for California, where they are gonna go into the pictures. She says she ain't wised the Kid to the game we was playing on him—or thought we was—and she hopes there'll be no hard feelings."

"No hard feelings!" I begins in a voice which you could have probably heard without the least difficulty in Montenegro.

"Be good!" pleads Eddie. "Listen. I admit you got a grievance on account of losin' your meal card. Well, you got nothing on me. I not only lose my meal ticket, because you might as well say that's what Gladys was, but I lose a bride! We was engaged to be married next month."

Well, at that I kinda cool off, because it sure does look like Eddie's had a pretty rough deal slipped to him.

"All right, Eddie," I says finally. "All that is all that. But try to collect that thousand berries! Just try it!"

## THE GOSSIP HEART

ALL day I read your letter till the light  
Tiptoed away and suddenly came night,  
And all the stars of heaven leaned down to see,  
Peering across my shoulder like the eyes  
Of women envious, till I, grown wise,  
Kissed it, beloved, and hid it jealously.

Beneath my heart I hid it, and most sure  
I deemed its resting-place and all secure;

But lo! my traitor heart the whole night through  
Thrills with the knowledge I would fain secrete.  
Oh, faithless, gossip heart, whose every beat  
Is but a whisper of a word of you!

*Theodosia Garrison.*



# From the Ground Up

By **LELAND S. CHESTER**

**T**ECHNICALLY Dave Thorne was the best conductor on the Rock Hill division of the T. L. & G.; personally he was the very worst. He knew more about the safe and prompt movement of trains than any other man on the division, and he exercised that knowledge with a precision and directness that was next to uncanny. The outstanding admonition in the book of rules to the effect that "When in doubt, take the safe course and run no risks," was not written for Dave. He seemed never in doubt. There is no prophesying the heights he might have attained had he not, in the parlance, developed the "swellhead."

In addition to his skill a guardian angel seemed to watch over Dave Thorne. In his eight years of service on the Rock Hill division he had never had a wreck. Through no fault of their own, the best of

trainmen have wrecks; a car or an engine may leave the rails, split a switch or meet with a thousand other unavoidable mishaps. But none of these had ever happened to Dave. Luck, of course; but it looked good on the records.

In Dave's time trainmen were poorly organized, especially on the T. L. & G. Promotion was based more upon record and favoritism than upon length of service. Dave had risen rapidly from brakeman to conductor, and on up through the classified freight runs to the blue uniform of an extra passenger man. For a man not quite thirty he was indeed getting on.

But, as already stated, success had gone to his head. No member of his crew could get along with him. They were constantly deserting his runs for more congenial working mates; and when, perchance, some man endured his arrogance

and remained, that man sooner or later was "turned in" and removed on some charge or other.

This practice, had Dave stopped to consider it, was more detrimental to himself than to the others. He was forever getting new men—"Students," as they were termed, who were just breaking into the game and knew little or nothing about the work expected of them. This threw most of the work and all the responsibility upon Dave, and did not tend to improve his efficiency.

After "turning in" a particularly able brakeman for no more reprehensible reason than that the man had "talked back" to him, a clean looking young fellow of twenty-one or two, intelligent, industrious and anxious to learn, who had just completed his student trips, was assigned to Dave's run. Upon their first meeting, when the young man had brought his engine from the roundhouse and was coupling it to the train, Dave looked him over critically, sneered, and observed:

"Another student, eh? Wonder how this road expects to run trains with dubs like you? It's enough to make a man throw up his job and go where they use some judgment."

"We all have to learn, you know," the young fellow returned smilingly; "and I suppose this road has to teach its share of us."

Dave whipped out his time book and pencil. "What's your name? I suppose I'll have to turn in your time for the trip anyhow."

"My name is Ewing," replied the other, still smiling—"Edwin L. Ewing."

"All right—Ewing," Dave snapped as he inscribed the name and jammed the book back into his pocket. "if you stay on this run you'll hit the ball. Try to remember that."

"Yes, sir," smiled Ewing. "That's what I'm here for."

The run was one of the best and fastest on the division, pulling only live stock and other perishable freight. There was little for a brakeman to do except ride. For two trips everything went on smoothly enough. Then Dave got an order to pick

up three cars of live stock at a station a few miles farther on. He handed the order bearing the car numbers and initials to Ewing, with the remark:

"Pick up these cars at Hadley while I'm getting the bills from the agent. And," he added with a sneer, "see if you can do it right."

"Yes, sir," said Ewing pleasantly.

The cars were on the stock track at the loading chute. A passing extra had kicked two empties in on top of them. The proper method would have been to bring all five cars out at once, leave the loads on the main, and kick the empties back on to the stock track again. Instead, Ewing first brought out the empties, went back for the loads, coupled them ahead of the empties and set the two back on the stock track, thus making two extra switches.

Dave Thorne came running up just as the engine was coming out on the main from the last operation.

"Of all the brainless, useless, muddle-headed dubs!" he shouted, throwing his arms and swearing with the fluency of long practice. "Didn't you know enough to bring all those cars out at once, leave the loads on the main and simply kick the empties back?"

"I know it now," returned the brakeman; "but I didn't think of it until I was almost through. You should have told me."

"That's the trouble with you, and about nine-tenths of the other fatheads on this road," Thorne raged. "You never think. You expect some one else to do it for you. If a thought should ever get in that dome of yours it would split wide open. Now couple up that train—if you know enough—and let's go."

Instead of darting confusedly about his work, as most students were wont to do under Dave's tirades, Ewing straightened, placed his hands on his hips and grinned calmly up at him.

"Say," he asked, "do you think such talk tends to promote efficiency among your men, or that it will influence officials to give you a better job?"

Dave moved forward threateningly.

"No more of your lip, young fellow,

You couple up that train, as I told you. This is your last trip with me."

"You can bet it is," said Ewing, still calm. "Just leave that to me. You'll get another man next trip, all right. I'll see to that."

"When I was called for this run," he went on, without giving Thorne a chance to break in, "I was told to steer clear of you, that you had the swellhead so bad nobody could get along with you and I'd last only a trip or two anyhow. You're a good railroad man, though; they all give you credit for that, and I was glad to get on with you so I could watch you work and learn how you did things. I'm in this game to learn it from the ground up; but I'm of the opinion now that I can learn more from some one with less knowledge of railroading and a little more principle."

Dave Thorne sneered. "From the ground up! Well, you'd better try the pick and shovel route. That's the only way you'll ever be of any use to a railroad. I'm telling you for the last time to couple up that train."

"Thanks for the encouragement," returned Ewing. "But watch me. I'm in this game to stay, and I'm going right on up, even though you do think I'm a fat-head and incapable of thought. Some day I may be superintendent of this division," he added lightly, "and if I am I'll make you hit the ball. I'll fire you so thoroughly you can't even get a job with a pick and shovel. And now, kind sir, I'll couple up your train."

Ordinarily when a brakeman had made a trip or two with him and then either left of his own volition or was removed at Dave's request, Thorne promptly forgot him. But somehow young Ewing stuck in his mind. For one thing, he was far above the average in education, appearance and willingness; for another, he had expressed himself in an easy, fearless manner, without the least trace of excitement or anger. Dave had to admit, reluctantly, to be sure, that the young fellow had the makings of a railroad man.

Thereafter for a time Dave saw Ewing at various points along the road, sometimes on extras, sometimes on locals, now

and then on the manifest opposite his own. Then he saw the boy no more, and after a time he forgot him.

Meanwhile, however, things were happening at the division office. Officials, it seems, had grown weary of his eternal friction with the men. Besides, there had been complaints from patrons of the road for incivilities suffered on Thorne's occasional trips as extra passenger conductor. He was summoned to the superintendent's office, and the resulting conference was anything but pleasant.

"We've about reached our limit with you, Dave," the official told him pointedly. "In view of your record we have tried to ignore your constant scrapping with the men, hoping that you might see the utter senselessness of such an attitude and abandon it. But when patrons of the road begin to complain, we have no choice in the matter. When the public pays a corporation for service, it wants service, and not abuse from an employee. As a matter of discipline, Dave, we have decided to retire you from passenger work for at least one year."

That ended the interview. But instead of showing Dave the error of his way—the handwriting on the wall, as it were—it served only to create a resentment toward the official which heretofore had not existed. The thing was plain enough to Thorne, once he had thought it over. The superintendent was afraid of him, jealous of his ability, fearful lest those higher in authority should discover and reward him. The superintendent was afraid of his job.

Dave's promotion to extra passenger conductor, ahead of men much older in the service, had been a triumph, a red-letter day in his career. To don his new uniform and strut up and down the aisle of a well-filled coach, snapping out orders to his flagman, berating a passenger for the unwitting violation of some company rule inaugurated for the safety of patrons, had fed his ego and given to him, in his own opinion, an air of vast authority.

Therefore, it was a crushing blow to his ambition and pride when he was ordered to pack his trim blue uniform in moth balls and lay it aside for a year. He grew

more abusive, more domineering than before. Within a year there was another summons to the division office, a more vigorous reprimand, and still further reduction in status. This time he was assigned to the local freight run.

And still he did not take heed. The next act of official disapproval came in the form of a letter. It was brief and to the point:

Effective at once and until further notice. Conductor David Thorne had been assigned to the chain gang.

The chain gang, as all railroad men know, is made up of crews which have no regular runs. Their work consists chiefly of moving the long, heavy trains of coal, lumber and other slow freight. They are called out in the order of their arrival at a division point, sometimes at noon, sometimes at midnight, any hour they are needed.

Dave had been through all this years before. He detested the slow, heavy trains, long, irregular hours and uncertain earnings. Yet there was nothing to do but accept or resign; and he had no thought of the latter. In spite of the superintendent's persecution, the man's determination to keep him down, he felt that higher officials would somehow discover his unusual qualifications and resent the treatment to which he was being subjected.

So, inwardly seething, Dave Thorne took his place in the chain gang; and there, with no credit to himself, he got along better. In the chain gang train and engine crews seldom make two consecutive round trips together; and as the brakemen assigned to Dave were chiefly of the "Boomer" type, constantly coming and going, it was not necessary to request a man's removal, or for a man to seek removal of his own accord. That was brought about automatically.

With the absence of reported friction the superintendent must have concluded that Dave had at last fallen into his proper niche, and that for all concerned it was best that he remain there. At any rate, there were no more summonses to the office, no further correspondence of a disciplinary nature.

In time Dave Thorne began to silver at the temples; his shoulders took on a weary and discouraged droop. The long, heavy drags of slow freight, with their attendant irregularity of rest and meals, were beginning to tell upon him. Outwardly the change was only physical; he was the same old arrogant, domineering Dave; but inwardly, although he would not have admitted it, even to himself, another and still greater change was in process. Slowly but surely his spirit was being broken.

Day by day, at various points along the road, he was met or passed by men who, years before, had been his brakemen. They were now far above him. Some were conductors of the fast manifest runs; two or three were old heads in the passenger service. Now and then as they flashed by a man would raise a hand in perfunctory greeting, but as a rule they ignored him. They had worked together, he and these men, but they had never been friends. For that matter, there wasn't a man on the division who was or ever had been his friend.

Came a day when Dave Thorne, alone in his ancient caboose, creaking jerkily in the wake of a half-mile string of loaded gondolas, grew introspective and took stock of himself. It came to him suddenly that he was a failure. It was ten years now since he had been reduced to the chain gang. Here he was forty years old, and exactly where he had been sixteen years ago when first promoted to conductor. Something was wrong, and that something was Dave Thorne.

For the first time in his life he saw himself as he really was. "And with the discovery came a stab of self-condemnation and a tremor of fear. He didn't blame the men for disliking him, nor the superintendent for his acts of discipline, now that he understood himself. He wondered that he hadn't been discharged outright. He might even be discharged yet."

There were other matters that had worried him of late, too. He had a wife and two children, a boy fifteen and a girl twelve. And whatever his attitude toward others, he loved his family with a passion that would have surprised his acquain-

tances could they have known the depth of it. He had planned great things for that son and daughter—high school, college, a profession for the boy; music, art, any accomplishment the girl might desire. Through his own arbitrary nature that dream had been wrecked. There was only one course left to him now: Strive with all his might to hold his present job and give them what he could with its scant remuneration.

From that moment Dave Thorne was a changed man. Soon brakemen were asking to be assigned to his car; engineers and firemen spoke of him as "a prince of a fellow." On the road other conductors waved a comradely greeting or called out some word of friendly banter as they met or passed him. And although Dave felt that he had delayed this transformation too long, that it could now avail him nothing, so far as promotion was concerned, he was, nevertheless, genuinely happy.

Then came news that the T. L. & G. had been absorbed by one of the big trunk lines. Antiquated rolling stock was to be replaced with new and improved equipment; the road was to have heavier steel and additional ballast; working conditions were to be improved and the wage scale adjusted to a union basis. Also the trunk line was to install a superintendent familiar with its policies and capable of transforming the old slipshod T. L. & G. into a regular railroad.

At first Dave Thorne felt a sense of elation. Perhaps, after all, there was a chance for him. With the official docket swept clean, with no longer any personal dislike or antagonism on the part of his immediate superiors, he might be rewarded with the status to which his long service entitled him.

Two months later a bulletin appeared in the yard office announcing the appointment of a new superintendent. In substance it read:

Mr. Edwin L. Ewing has been appointed superintendent of the Rock Hill division to succeed Mr. F. J. Morehouse, transferred.

Although vaguely familiar, the name at first meant nothing to Dave. It seemed to

him that, some time in the past, he had known an Edwin L. Ewing. Still, lots of men had identical names, and there was nothing strange in one's knowing two of them.

The incident was passing from his thoughts, when suddenly a yard clerk pointed out through the open door, remarking:

"Look! There's the bird now. There's the new super. Used to be a brakeman here."

Dave's gaze followed the pointing finger. The yardmaster, accompanied by a trim, neatly-dressed, businesslike young man, had just emerged from the roundhouse and was crossing the tracks toward the division office. And with that look Dave's heart skipped a beat. There was no mistaking the stranger's identity. Edwin L. Ewing, the new superintendent, was none other than the brakeman he had abused for bungling the little job of switching more than twelve years ago.

"I'm in the game to learn it from the ground up." He recalled the exact words Ewing had spoken that day; and his own sneering reply: "From the ground up! Well, you'd better try the pick and shovel route. That's the only way you'll ever be of any use to a railroad." And again Ewing's concluding retort: "Some day I may be superintendent of this division, and if I am I'll make you hit the ball. I'll fire you so thoroughly you can't even get a job with a pick and shovel."

Well, somehow that young man's idle boast had come true. Was it fate, coincidence, or the man's own vengeful contriving that had brought him back here with authority to fulfill a threat made years ago? Malice, Dave knew, often lends stimulus to a man's ambition for position and power. Could this be true in Ewing's case? He didn't try to formulate an answer.

For several days he contrived to keep out of Ewing's sight. He dreaded the meeting, not only because he feared the result, but because, now that he had come to realize the folly of the old days, he was heartily ashamed of the way he had abused the well-meaning brakeman.

"Have you met the new super yet?" a fellow conductor asked him one day. "Regular fellow, I'll tell the world. Nothing high and mighty about Ewing. He's just one of the boys. And by the way, Dave, he was speaking of you a few days ago. Said he used to brake for you."

Dave Thorne gulped and looked away. "Yes," he said, "he did make a trip or two with me, I believe."

So the man still remembered, and some of these days— He tried not to think of it.

When a full month had gone by and he had neither met nor received any communication from the new official, Dave began to breathe easier. Then, upon registering in late one night, he found a letter in the yard office mail box for him. It was from Ewing, and it requested him to report at the division office the following morning at nine. And that night when Dave Thorne reached home he buried his head in his wife's lap and broke down utterly.

"I'm through here, Janie," he said, and choked in spite of himself. "The new superintendent was one of my brakemen twelve years ago. I abused him like a dog, the way I did everybody in those days. He boasted he'd fire me if he ever had a chance. Well, he's got his chance. And—and he's summoned me to his office to-morrow morning. I know what that means, Janie. I'm through. What will become of us—you and the children?"

His wife stroked his hair and tried to cheer him. Because he had always been the most affectionate and considerate of husbands and fathers, and because she had never known his other nature, she believed in him. Like a good wife she had believed all along that he was a martyr to official jealousy.

"Don't worry, daddy," she told him. "You're the best conductor on the division. Many's the time I've heard the other men say so. They never have treated you right. Whatever happens won't be your fault, and we'll get along—we'll get along somehow."

The next morning before leaving home Dave wrote out his resignation. He'd rob Ewing of that much pleasure anyhow.

When he entered the superintendent's office at nine, Ewing swung about in his desk chair and smiled up at him. The man hadn't changed much, Dave thought. He was older, to be sure; rounder, firmer, with the solid lines of healthily-matured manhood; but he still had the old boyish-self-confident look Thorne remembered so well.

"Hello, Thorne," he greeted easily. "Sit down."

Dave shifted and tried to assume his old arrogance.

"That won't be necessary, Ew—Mr. Ewing. I know what I'm here for, and there's no use beating about the bush. Here's my resignation."

Ewing took the folded paper, glanced at it, and tossed it to his desk.

"Well, sit down anyway—for old time's sake," he invited, and smiled.

Thorne perched on the edge of a chair and eyed the man as unconcernedly as he could force himself to appear.

"We are having the same thoughts this morning, I imagine, Thorne" Ewing began presently. "We are thinking that this old world is a pretty small affair, and that life is short, too, now that we have occasion to look back upon a certain long past event. We can hardly believe that it is more than twelve years since we first met here on this very division; and we are wondering just how it came about, after all those years, that we should again meet here under present conditions.

"Being back here, Thorne, where I first broke into the game, has thrown me into a reminiscent mood, and I feel like talking. And without meaning to preach, or boast of personal achievement, there are some things I would like to say to you, if you care to listen.

"When I left the T. L. & G. and went with the Great Continental," he continued, without giving Dave a chance to reply. "I had no thought of ever returning to this road again. The truth of the matter is, Thorne, I came here merely for experience. I had always wanted to work for the Continental, but as it is a stickler for trained men, I knew that a year with some other road would be a valuable asset when ap-

plying to it for a position. I came here for that year.

"As I told you that day at Hadley," he smiled reminiscently "I was in the game to learn it from the ground up. There was something about a railroad, even as a child, that fascinated me. I could never imagine myself doing anything else. And now, after more than twelve years of rail-roading, I still love it. I'm in it, heart, body and soul.

"Well, after my year here, the Continental gave me a job. And I have always believed, Thorne, that if a job is worth having it is worth doing, not only well, but as near perfectly as it is humanly possible to do it. Another thing—a man should never be selfish with his knowledge. If you know a thing better than the man who is working with you, for you, and to the same end, share your knowledge with him. It creates good fellowship, harmony and efficiency, and results to your advantage even more than to the other fellow's.

"I have always striven to that end, Thorne. The Continental noticed it, appreciated it, and repaid me. When it absorbed the T. L. & G. it sent me down here, not only because it believed I understood and would carry out its policies, but because it felt that I would do all within my power to gain the respect and good will of the men. Which after all is the big thing."

He looked searchingly at Dave Thorne.

"I have often wondered, Dave, where you might have been to-day if you had followed those simple rules."

Dave shifted in his chair, looked at Ewing, away again, and stood up. In his present state of mind he thought of a sleek young tomcat worrying a helpless old mouse, enjoying the torture while he worked up an appetite for the coming feast.

"If that's all, Mr. Ewing," he said, "I'll be going along. I've been a darn

fool most of my life. Nobody knows that better than me. But I don't like to have it rubbed in. It hurts. I've never forgotten what you said that day. Well, you're superintendent now, and"—he pointed to the folded paper on the desk—"there's my resignation."

Ewing threw back his head and laughed, not cynically nor triumphantly, but with a whole-heartedness that brought tears to his eyes.

"Yes, I remember that, too," he said, still laughing. "But that's been a long time ago, Thorne, and time is a great eraser of grudges. In striving for bigger and better things we outgrow our petty piques and vanities. I understand, Dave, that you have outgrown some things in the last year or so."

"I've tried to," admitted Dave promptly. "If a man's a fool he'll find it out some day, if he'll stop and look into himself. I did that, and I'm mighty proud of it, even if I did wait too long. I'll be going now, Mr. Ewing."

"Just a minute." Ewing turned to his desk and took up Dave's resignation. "I didn't expect you to do this, Thorne; but since you've elected to do it, and since it's in line with my plans, there's nothing to do but accept it. As you already know, or have heard, the T. L. & G. is to be thoroughly reorganized. Not only the equipment, roadbed and working conditions are to be improved, but also the personnel. In view of the latter, Thorne, we no longer have a place for you—as a conductor.

"However," he concluded with a boyish grin, "since you were always considered the best conductor on the T. L. & G., and in talking with the men I find you are now one of the most liked, and since the present trainmaster is to be transferred and I have been ordered to recommend the most able man on the division to succeed him, I have taken the liberty, Mr. David Thorne, of recommending you."

U U U U

Next week's Complete Novelette will be a stirring romance of love and treasure in Pacific isles.

OUT OF THE CORAL SEA. By S. GORDON GURWIT.



# The Blonde Jinx

By HELEN HYSELL

THEY were a striking couple, the silvery blonde at the corner table and her dark-haired, thin companion. Striking, not only because of their opposite coloring, but because of the contrast in the expression with which each regarded the other. Even a most casual observer in the inexpensive restaurant on Fifth Avenue near Twenty-Sixth Street would have known at once that Lois McAllister saw Oliver as the one man in all the world.

The walls about them were cold white tile. The imitation marble-topped table between them was cool and sticky. Only the ice cream they were eating and the smile on Lois's lips were soft and warm.

She looked at him now, through a yearning, violet-tinted haze of adoration tinged

with sadness. And Oliver, momentarily overcome by a fit of coughing, lifted his head to glare at her, belligerently.

"You've simply got to take that cold out of this climate, Ollie, old dear," said Lois. "California is—"

Oliver's mirthless laugh interrupted her. "It takes a blonde to tell a fellow what to do when she knows he can't do it," he grumbled. "Maybe you think I wouldn't go in a minute if I could stop coughing long enough to make a decent haul. But I can't. Only last week, when I was prowling that joint in Yonkers, I had to quit and make a get-away before somebody thought the chimney had the croup."

Oliver Ohle was, or had been a burglar, and a prosperous one. His step was sound-

less and his hand steady. Too, he seemed to possess a strange sixth sense that led him to hidden treasures. But a bad cold, caught while rescuing a suicide from the lake in Central Park—if he had known the woman was a blonde he would probably have let her go to her reward—had settled down into a deep and rumbling cough. Bronchial rather than lungs, the doctor said, but a change of climate was advisable. And Oliver was broke. He couldn't ply his trade as long as the cough clung to him and he couldn't get rid of the cough unless he could raise enough money to take him away from the salt, damp air of New York. Oliver was out of luck and Lois knew it.

"I've got two thousand put away," she reminded him insinuatingly. "We could go West in style on two grand. I could get a job in a cabaret out there while you hunted for something honest and—safe."

Few real men relish the idea of borrowing money from a woman. Some of these show their appreciation of the offer, however, while others, secretly pleased, hide behind a screen of anger at the very suggestion. The fact that Oliver was grateful to Lois made his refusal all the more emphatic.

"Nothing doing!" he said decidedly and rose to tower above her glaringly. "I'm not taking a cent from any blonde, male or female. And I'm not traveling across the country with one either—not on your pretty, pale-faced life I'm not. Blondes are my jinx!"

He stalked toward the cashier, who happened to be a blonde of the bottled variety, and slapped his last dollar down upon the counter.

Lois followed. She understood Oliver. She knew that he liked her in spite of her sun-kissed tresses and she knew exactly what to say, and, better yet, what not to say, when he rebuffed her.

"I'm not asking you to go with me," she murmured as she trailed him through the door and across the street toward Madison Square Park. "I only want you to be there, so I won't get so lonesome."

"Well, you'll have to worry along 'till you make some new friends out there," stated Oliver with finality. "You're a

good kid and all that but—you're a blonde and blondes are my jinx."

Lois pulled her mauve feather hat farther down over the offending curls. "If I dyed it," she mused, "it wouldn't match my complexion."

"Your brain would stay blonde anyhow," said Oliver. "And it's blonde brains that have me jinxed. It was a blonde maid that dropped the monkey wrench into the biggest haul I ever had a chance to make—she forgot about the burglar alarm. And it was a blonde that made me catch this cold," he coughed tentatively. "And a blonde almost snared me into marrying her once and cost me my roll. It wouldn't do me any good for you to turn brunette on top."

Lois had heard all this before and her attention deserted him to pursue an idea that had popped into her head.

"Did you ever try a stick-up?" she asked with seeming irrelevance.

"Once," admitted Oliver. "Proved that blondes have me jinxed—male and female. The guy turned out to have taffy-colored hair and a dollar and thirty cents."

Lois perched upon the end of a bench in the park and proceeded to develop the idea that had inspired the question. Oliver slumped down beside her, coughing disgustedly.

"I've got a date with Tommy Hammil to-night after the show," said Lois at the end of a long silence.

Oliver frowned. Lois spoke rather often of Tommy. The young man represented the sum total of a wealthy family. Laboring under the delusion that he was liked for himself alone he spent his allowance so freely that he was usually on the verge of being disowned. But Tommy really was a likable youngster and Lois enjoyed his airy chatter and sincere good will toward the world. Oliver envied Tommy, his wealth and disliked the young man exceedingly. The very name of Hammil brought a furrow to Oliver's fallow brow.

Lois saw the frown and tucked it away in her heart to be analyzed later. Perhaps Oliver was jealous of Tommy without knowing it. Oliver had never seen Hammil, but Lois had mentioned some of his good qualities, especially when those qualities

were in strong contrast to bad traits possessed by Oliver.

"Tommy didn't use to carry much money around with him," she continued, "but he's made a pile lately and last Friday he had more than a thousand dollars in his poke."

Oliver used to carry large sums of money about, too. Now his pockets were empty. He stirred resentfully. "What's that lounge-lizard got to do with me?"

Lois powdered her nose thoroughly and searched her purse for a lip stick. "Oh, nothing," she answered indifferently. "Only—Tommy isn't a blond and you'd get more than a dollar thirty if I led him into a doorway so you could take his roll away from him."

Oliver eyed her with suspicion not unmixed with hope. "Where did you find that idea?" he asked.

"It's a good one, isn't it?" countered Lois. "Tommy's a nice kid and it's a shame to frame him, but you need the money and—"

"And, being a blonde, you'd double-cross your best friend if you saw a chance," amended Oliver.

"Nothing of the kind!" protested Lois. "Tommy isn't my best friend and besides—if you don't get his roll somebody else will. That gang of bootleggers he's supporting think he's a bank. It would be real charity to save him from a hooch-over headache for a couple of days. You'd get at least a thousand—maybe more."

Oliver gazed into the face of the Metropolitan clock and listened while Lois outlined the details of her plan. It would be so easy. Tommy would go anywhere she wanted him to go and there were so many dark doorways in New York after the theater crowd had gone home and to bed. There was a peach of a place on Fifty-Fifth Street. Rose Roselle lived on Fifty-Fifth Street, and Lois went to see her now and then. Rose had pointed out this particular hallway as a perfect place for a hold-up. Oliver could go there about one o'clock and wait until Lois led Tommy up the steps. Then Oliver could pull his gun, frisk Tommy and wander away.

Oliver heard her to the very end of her plan. The minute hand on the Metropolitan

clock sped from the half hour to the three quarter and the bell chimed its unfinished melody. Lois talked rapidly and well. Oliver had said he wanted to make his stake with his own two hands. Well, here was his chance.

"We'll split fifty-fifty on whatever you get from Tommy," Lois finished, "and we can take the first train for Connecticut, get married and go on to Chicago where the train starts for California."

"There's only about fifty-seven different things the matter with your scheme," said Oliver abruptly. "In the first place, you're a blonde"—he turned toward her, accusation in his eyes, "and blondes are my jinx."

Lois clapped her hat upon her head to cover the curls that so aroused his ire. She might have known that he would object to her plan. Men were so set in their notions. Oliver would never believe that blondes weren't bad luck until she proved it to him, and he wouldn't give her a chance to prove anything. She rose.

"I've got to get on the job," she said languidly. "I promised to give a new girl some pointers on my latest dance steps. If you change your mind about that scheme of mine, let me know."

"I'm not going to change my mind," answered Oliver. "The chances are you'd take this Tommy guy up to Two Hundred and Fifty-Fifth Street. Blondes haven't any sense of location." He piloted her toward the corner to wait for a bus. "And you'd just as likely as not bring a policeman along to make sure I did the job thoroughly. And—I'm not going to Connecticut or anywhere else with a blonde. You're a good kid, Lois, and you'll make some man a peach of a wife, but"—he sighed an unconsciously regretful sigh—"I'm not the man." A bus rumbled to a stop and Oliver assisted Lois up the steps. "Sorry," he murmured by way of good-by, "but blondes have me jinxed. Me for a brunette."

Lois smiled a sad farewell and settled herself upon the front seat of the bus where she could watch the narrow margins negotiated by the driver. The driver was a blonde. So were five out of six women on the bus. All looked more or less safe. None

of them looked as if they had brought bad luck to anyone excepting themselves.

Oliver was ordinarily so sane and sensible. A bit cross at times, especially since his cough bothered him so much; a bit unreasonable about honesty and fair play—considering his former profession—but ordinarily Oliver was well worth the best efforts of any girl. And Oliver had admitted that she would make a satisfactory wife for some one. She smiled at the thought of a honeymoon spent in California, and the brain beneath the silvery curls began to improve upon her original plan to help Oliver pay his own way to Frisco.

## II.

In the restaurant where Lois McAllister danced her way through the hearts of the orchestra, straight to the pocket books of the patrons, the performers were allowed an occasional moment of conversation with their admirers. The management considered this good business and the girls took advantage of it—in order to chat with their own particular sweethearts more often than with the moneyed patrons of the restaurant.

The moment Tommy Hammil appeared at his table, Lois sent word to him to come back stage. In the cozy little reception-room she greeted him effusively and smiled adorably as she talked. She even descended to a giggle or two and Tommy, pink-cheeked and willing, departed with a chuckle of anticipation. The evening would prove exciting, even if he was spending his last twenty-dollar bill.

Later, Lois slipped into the telephone booth near her dressing room door and called Oliver Ohle.

"I've broken my date with Tommy," she said when she heard the deeply husky voice at the other end of the wire. "Rose Roselle is having a party in her room tonight. Will you take me?"

A rumbling cough from Oliver developed into a refusal. "I'm tired," he said. "Besides, it's beginning to rain and you know yourself I oughtn't to go out with holes in the soles of my shoes."

"You've got rubbers," said Lois cheerfully. "Wear 'em!"

"Don't know where they are," Oliver coughed again. "Why don't you take that lounge-lizard with the fat roll? He'll buy you a taxi."

"I'll buy my own taxi if I need one," answered Lois. "Anyhow, I don't want Tommy. I want you. Please, Ollie—I've already told Rose that you'd come. She'll think I'm ditched if you turn me down. Please, Oliver, take me to Rose's party."

Oliver's bark was always worse than his bite. His refusal gradually turned into acceptance, just as Lois had known that it would. Oliver Ohle had been a sociable soul before his cough interfered with his profession and his finances.

Lois hung up the receiver with a throaty little laugh of happiness. Oliver was a dear and she loved him. She would make him forget his fear of blondes. Blondes were all right if you pick the right one. Sooner or later, Oliver would find out that at least one blonde would bring him good luck.

## III.

WHEN Oliver appeared, wearing his rubbers, Lois gave him her sweetest and most enchanting smile. Ollie returned it; this dainty, exquisite blonde was really pretty. Ollie walked with her from the front of the restaurant where he met her, conscious of the admiring glances of all the men on the street whose eyesight was good.

As they strolled up Broadway beneath Oliver's umbrella, he began to wish that Lois was a brunette. She liked him, that was certain; the touch of her soft, pink-palmed hand within his elbow was comfortable and pleasant; her violet eyes glowed softly. If Lois had only been born a brunette—

At this time of night Fifty-Fifth Street was practically deserted. Only an occasional roving taxi or a homeward bound pedestrian drifted upon the street.

"This is the place," said Lois, a slight pressure on Oliver's arm guiding him up a flight of stone steps. "Rose is going to have a lot of—"

They had reached the top. A tomb-like hallway waited to engulf them.

"Isn't this a lovely place for a hold-up?"

she asked, stepping into the blackness. "Good thing I know which bell to ring."

A harsh, sharp voice shot forth a command from the dark. "Stick 'em up, both of you! No monkey business unless you want your faces shot off!"

A hold-up! Oliver grinned. He hoped the hold-up man was a blond. If so, the gentleman deserved the disappointment that was coming to him. Oliver had one lone Canadian dime and that was all. He knew that Lois was too wise and too frail to carry more than her "mad money"—a dollar, with perhaps a nickel for subway fare.

"Crowd into that corner," continued the hold-up man, "the one who makes a noise is screaming for the coroner. And keep your hands up!"

Oliver obeyed the order. He was watching the dim figure that loomed threateningly in the darkness. He made no defense; merely waited. He took it for granted that Lois had obeyed the order, too. After the first gasp of surprise, she had remained silent beside him.

The man stepped toward them, and one hand stretched forward to Oliver's breast pocket. At that second Oliver flashed into life. One hand swept down to his hip pocket, and in the same movement it came out again with a businesslike revolver. The other hand leaped forward, grasping the hold-up man's wrist, pointing his gun aloft.

"Drop it!" ordered Oliver snappily, jamming his revolver into the other's belt buckle.

The hold-up man obeyed, then he began to laugh. "I didn't know you were going to do that," he said. "Lois, I guess you lose your bet."

"Tommy!" Lois's exclamation of surprise was truly a work of art.

"Sure, it's Tommy," the hold-up man replied. "You said that this fellow had boasted that he wouldn't stand for a stick-up, but I didn't expect—"

"Pin your mouth shut," commanded Oliver crisply. "What's this all about?"

"It was a joke," Tommy replied, a trifle uneasily. "Lois thought it would be fun to have you held up. The joke's on you, Mr. Oliver Ohle."

"Oh, is it?" Oliver did not seem to be

amused by the jest. "Keep your hands pointed at the stars. I need the money."

"But, Ollie! This is Tommy Ham-mil!" Lois explained, and moved closer to the young man just to show that she trusted him.

"Another whisper from either of you," Oliver remarked grimly, "and I'll smear you all over this hallway." His fingers were busy. "So you are Tommy, are you?" he asked pleasantly. "Young man, you picked the wrong umba to play your pretty little tricks on." He found a nice fat pocketbook. "You lose this, just for making me mad."

Tommy found his voice at last. "Lois didn't tell me you'd get mad, Mr. Ohle. She just said that nobody could stick you up and—"

"Lois is a blonde," interrupted Oliver. "To-night will teach you not to trust blondes. They're dangerous."

"But—" Lois clasped Oliver's arm. "You wouldn't—why, I didn't know—Ollie, this is Tommy. I've mentioned him to you, dear. Just this afternoon I—"

"Hands off, or I'll make this goof look like a sieve!" Oliver was in no mood for argument. He put one finger under Tommy's chin, lifting his head. "Look at me, and then forget me," he said to the young man. "I'm going away from here now and if you ever see me again, close your eyes and say softly, 'This cannot be true.' If you let out a peep to the cops, you'll regret it for the rest of your life—which won't be long."

Tommy was frightened. He had not expected to be treated in this fashion. "I—I'll—not say a—a word to—"

"That will do!" Oliver turned, grasped Lois by the wrist, and started down the steps. "Be deaf and dumb and petrified for the next five minutes, Tommy darling," he called gayly. "I might come back to sweetums."

#### IV.

It was a different Oliver that turned the corner at the end of the block. "You pulled another blond bonchead," he said, "telling that 'nice boy' that I'd stand for a bum joke like that. What are you going

to do now? Tommy's sure to have you pinched."

Lois had accompanied him this far willingly; she did not desert him now. "He can't have me arrested," she said happily. "I resigned from the cabaret to-night and I've got everything packed ready to go to California. I'm starting to-morrow."

"But Tommy knows where you live. And he knows that you know me and—"

"Ollie, won't you ever learn anything about blondes?" she asked plaintively. "I moved to a new hotel the other day and I didn't leave a forwarding address." She sighed softly. "Ollie, won't you go out West with me? You've got money now; I know Tommy always packed a roll and I won't even ask you to split fifty-fifty."

In the glare of an arch-light Oliver stopped, swiftly went through the pocket-book he had taken from Tommy, removed the bank notes and tossed the leather case into the gutter.

"Here's a taxi," he said.

After they were seated in the machine, Lois began again, "You don't have to go on the same train with me if you don't want to," she pleaded. "I just don't want to be in Frisco all alone—"

"You've got to get out of New York," declared Oliver. "If you were auburn-haired, I'd marry you in a minute, Lois. If you were bald it wouldn't be so bad. But you near-albinos have always brought me bad luck and I'm not going to tie up with my jinx."

"All right!" The approaching tears disappeared from Lois's eyes, her charming chin grew firm. "Then I'm not going to California," she said. "I'm going to stay in New York with you. Ollie, I'd rather be in jail in the same city with you than loose in California by myself."

"What! Are you crazy? Don't you realize—"

"I realize everything," Lois's tone indicated that she meant what she said. "And I've got more sense in one of my bobbed hairs than any forty men in the world, even if I am a blonde." She leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. "Drive to the nearest police station," she commanded.

Oliver's eyes seemed frozen open; he had

forgotten to close his mouth. "Say," he exclaimed after a moment, "that's not right! I don't want—"

"But I do! It's no use pointing that awful revolver at me because I know you won't shoot me. You're in love with me, Ollie, and you won't hurt—"

"I'm in love—"

"Of course! I know you are, since I'm in love with you." Lois's feminine logic pleased her greatly. "If you don't go to California with me, you'll meet some girl, some horrid, mean brunette, and you'll imagine you're in love with her, and—to save you from another woman I'll— Stop here!" she said suddenly to the chauffeur. "There's a policeman coming this way."

A blue-clad, brass-buttoned officer of the law moved with dignified ponderousness down the street. He disappeared for a second, trying the door of a hardware store, then he came out and proceeded toward the taxi.

Oliver shivered. "You won't do it," he insisted in a tense whisper. "You won't squeal—"

"Ollie, you don't understand blondes a bit," Lois remarked patiently. "I'd do anything to keep you from falling in love with a brunette. I'll tell this cop that you just held up a man on Fifty-Fifth Street and I'll give him Tommy's name and address, and—"

## V.

CLAD in a mauve bathing suit that brought out the violet lights in her eyes, Lois reclined upon the pale tan beach at Diego. It was Sunday and the Pacific basked peacefully beneath a cloudless sky; a gentle breeze, tanged with salt, romped through her short, and still blonde, curls.

Oliver sat beside her, idly toying with handfuls of sand. He was a bronzed and robust Oliver, wearing his bathing suit like a life-saver, facing the world with clear-eyed contentment. Even if six months in California sunshine had not conquered his cough, it would not have mattered financially to Oliver Ohle, for he was no longer a burglar.

With the aid of a trusting soul back East, he had obtained employment with a

concern that manufactured burglar-proof safes and was now an honest citizen. Lois would soon give up her dancing for the more satisfying occupation of keeping a suburban bungalow in perfect order.

"Are you happy, dear?" asked Lois, knowing what the answer to her question would be.

"Sure," replied Oliver, braving public disapproval by kissing his wife.

"Happy enough to listen to something I've had on my conscience ever since we were married?" persisted Lois, her eyes upon the exquisite blue waters of the Pacific.

Oliver's smile was serene. "Go ahead," he requested. "I'm not afraid of you."

"I thought not." A pink-tinted glow drowsed through her as she turned toward him. "I knew all the time you'd get over your hate of blondes. Well, you remember that night you held up Tommy Hammil in New York?"

"Yes," Oliver grinned reminiscently. "He carried an awfully cheap poke for a rich man's son. I noticed it at the time, but was too busy to mention it."

"Well, Tommy had exactly one grand on him, didn't he? And, as you say, the

pocketbook was cheap. Also, it was new. Well"—Lois hesitated a second—"I wanted to loan you a thousand and you wouldn't take it because I was a blonde. I planned to give it to Tommy and get you to hold him up and you wouldn't do it because I was a blonde. So—I got him to hold you up, knowing that you wouldn't let him get away with it and—and I planted that pocketbook full of hundred-dollar bills on him while he giggled over the joke he and I had put up on you. Tommy didn't know he had that money. I slipped it in his pocket just before you frisked him."

Jolted by the news, Oliver's recovery took fully three minutes. At last he spoke and there was both awe and admiration in his voice. "I must have been wrong about blondes not having brains," he said slowly. "You got Tommy to hold me up so I'd get mad and frisk him, and you planted half your roll on him to make it worth my while and you got me to marry you and come to California with you and—"

Having summed up the situation to his own satisfaction, Oliver Ohle sighed in cheerful resignation. "I sure was wrong about blondes being my jinx," he said.



## A MATTER OF CHOICE

I SAT me down 'neath the hill of sorrow—

And sorrow's a high hill, covered with stones—

I sent to the neighbors for trouble to borrow,

I wept to-day for the woes of to-morrow,

And all of my friends might hear my groans;

They stopped their ears, for they heard my moans.

I hurried away where joy's stream is flowing—

Joy's is a full stream, that never is spent—

I waded in without any showing,

I laved me deep where its tide was going.

Now my friends would share in my deep content;

Where I borrowed trouble, my joy is lent.



# IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

*Received via W. O. McGEEHAN*

## HOW TO SCORE FOOTBALL GAMES



**M**R. POICY HAUGHTONSTEIN, which he used to be the coachman for the Harvard University footballing team, just wrote it a book which it tells you how you should watch it a footballing game. It is a very nice book on account the covers alone must have cost a lot of money, and I ain't knocking the book. Me and Poicy was chust like that when me and him was at Harvard together. I was up at Cambritches taking a lot of pictures from the Harvard footballers. Cambritches is the town where Harvard University is.

When I was first up there taking photografts for the newspepering business they made a funny mistake. One of the footballers seen me taking the photografts and he hol-lered: "Hey, fellers, here is a Yale spy taking photografts from the precticing."

Then he kicked me in the face, and a lot of other fellers came and they kicked me out from Harvard University. At first I got a little bit sore, on account I thought they didn't want me around the place, and I explanationed to them that I wasn't no Yale man and that I never even been to Yale University.

Then the captain from the footballing team he appologized in a nice way to me. He said: "You are such a funny looking feller that we was all sure that you was a Yale feller. The mistake was quite natural, so you couldn't blame nobody but yourself for what happened. The Yale fellers is such foolish looking fellers that we are all the time making mistakes. Last week we drowned a feller on account we thought he was a Yale man, and it came out on the corner's inkwitch that he was some poor feller which he escaped from a foolish house near here. Perhaps you come from the same place and not from New Haven at all."

I told him I was from New York, which I came there from Alice Island when they let me out from the steeritch of the boat which I came on it from Kovno in Lithuania. Then they apologized a whole lot more, and the feller which he kicked me in the face said he wouldn't do it no more, on account he had hurt his foot and couldn't prectice no more that day.

Poicy Haughtonstein told me I could stay and see the precticing on account I

looked so dumb that I couldn't understand the plays, anyhow, so there wouldn't be no harm done by nobody. He said so in such a nice way that I am feeling at home right away in the Harward camphouse, which is what they call it the big fields near Cambritches.

But I am kind of disappointed about Mr. Houghtonstein's book about how you should watch a footballing game and how you should call it the plays. According to Mr. Houghtonstein's way of talking I couldn't understand nothing about the footballing at all. He is talking about the shifts from Minnesota, and the right guard should go through the left teckle which, honest, is Greek to me.

It ain't Mr. Houghtonstein's fault, on account the only feller which he could description a footballing game in the right way is a doctor. Footballing is more in his line of business.

I got a friend who is in the doctoring business and I loined a lot about it from talking to him. Also when I was in the hospital that time I loined a whole lot more.



I got in the hospital on account I got too friendly with some of the Friendly Sons of St. Petrick on March 17. I only asked them if I could be elected a member. They ain't answered me yet. Anyhow, I don't think they have, because it was right after that that I went to the hospital and I never heard no more from the Friendly Sons of St. Petrick, so maybe they ain't so friendly, after all.

Here is how I would description the game so that a total stranger would understand what it is all about. You got to get some of the technical detailers or you wouldn't know who won.

The Yale full beck went through the center and broke two of his ribs. Harward got the two ribs back and one collar bone in a buck at the Yale teckle. The Yale left end chust broke his collar bone, but the Bulldog left guard chust brought in one Crimson ear and a shin bone from one of the Cambritches forwards.

Time was taken out after these few plays so that the amberlances could carry out three or four players. The Harward right end refused to ride in the same amberlance as the Yale left teckle, on account the amberlance was painted blue. He laid in the field till they got a crimson amberlance, and then he went out singing, "Fare, Harward," which it is some conductors' song they are all the time singing at Cambritches.

In the second quarter the play was a little rough as one of the incidents which it occurred would indication. A Harward feller pulled off a Yale feller's ear and threw it in his face, and the Yale feller hollered "Foul," which it held up the game while

the referee and the corner and the undertakers for each team held it a consulting. In the rule book it said that a loose ear in the field would belong to the feller which he should fall on it first, and Harward was penalized three ribs and a collar bone, which brought the ball to ten yards from the crimson bowl, and the Yale fellers sang it a song which they call it "The Undertaker's Song."

The undertakers, which they was stending by the side lines, took off their hats and bowed, and the Harward fellers holler: "Fight, fight!" This would seem kind of silly because from what a feller could observation the fighting had commenced to start a long time before that. If they wasn't fighting then I never seen no fighting. They made Chon L. Solomon look like he was only a pinocle player after all.

When the finish has ended to the game comes it the most important part from the footballing business how you should tell what it is the score. That is where a feller should know something about the medical business or he wouldn't even know who won.

The scoring is something like this: Yale, two collar bones, eighteen ribs, two compound frectures from the legs, three ears, one eye and four noses broke.

Harward, one collar bone, fourteen ribs, no compound frectures, one ear, no eyes and three noses.

From this score a expert like myself would know right away that the Yale footballers won the game. If you ain't really acquainted with the sports and don't know nothing about the medical business you would have to wisit all of the hospitals and get it the retoins from the house doctors, and then add them up, or if you don't do that you have to wait for the corner's inkwitch.

I am glad that Mr. Haughtonstein sent me the book even I couldn't understand it on account I want him to get Moe Konigsberg's cousin, Sol, the privileges of the Yale Bowl this season. Sol is in the doctoring business, but the trade is dull in New York and he would give the footballers a wery good rate provided he got the Yale Bowl exclusive.

FASHION NOTE—Crutches will be carried by all of the well-dressed fellers in the unjiversities this fall.

*Next week Izzy Kaplan will comment on THE FATE OF EX-CHAMPIONS*

U U U

## SEEING

HE saw a flower face  
And laughing eyes of blue,  
Two rosy parted lips  
With white pearls peeping through,  
A mass of golden hair  
And ankles neatly trim—  
He saw a tall fair maid  
Who looked quite good to him.

She saw a last year's hat,  
A mass of bleached, blond hair,  
And a gown that showed  
At least two seasons' wear,  
Gloves that were well worn  
And shoes that once were gray—  
She saw a girl who looked  
• Exceedingly passé.

Yet strange as it may seem,  
Amid the giddy whirl  
She and he had paused  
To watch the selfsame girl.

*Edgar Daniel Kramer.*  
10 A



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THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER CO

Manufacturers—Established 1845

CHICAGO NEW YORK CINCINNATI TORONTO

# BRUNSWICK

PHONOGRAPHS AND RECORDS

*In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.*

# \$12 and 10¢!

Yet He Had Never Sold Anything Before

"I am enclosing my first order. I secured this in just three hours. Out of 40 calls landed 36. Pretty good, don't you think?" W. H. Marion, Illinois. Think of it! \$36.00 real profit first day in only three hours! And he was only a beginner. Hundreds making more money than they ever dreamed possible with this wonderful plan.



## No Experience Required

No special ability needed. Just a few hours consecutive work each day. I teach you each step to take. Folks who never sold anything before find it easy with the Davis Line. "Sold my first ten boxes in less than one hour" says one chap. "All sold out; 30 boxes today 4½ hours work" writes another. And every sale means \$1.00 clear profit to you!

## A Permanent Business of Your Own

Davis products are used every day in every home in the land. You build up a permanent list of customers in short time. We stand back of you, quality guaranteed by this 25-year-old concern. Be your own boss. Be independent. Men and women representatives have been with us for 3 years, making more each year. \$100 a week is easy.

## FORD GIVEN

### If You Act Quick

No contest. No limit to number given away. Each and every producer gets a Ford as soon as he or she makes the quota. Brand new Ford Touring delivered to you by your local dealer on this, the most liberal offer ever made. When you write me, I will give you full details. Right now is the best time of year to start. Don't miss my special offers now open. Write quick before it is too late.



E. M. DAVIS COMPANY

Dept. 1298 (Established 1896) CHICAGO

## SAVE 60% ON STANDARD TIRES



### Send No Money!

Cut your tire bill. BUY STANDARD make tires such as Goodyear, Goodrich, Firestone and other adjusted tires at 40¢ on the dollar. They are in first class condition and may readily be guaranteed for 6,000 Miles. These are NOT double tread or sowed tires.

### Our Low Prices:

Size	Tires	Size	Tires	Size	Tires
28x3	\$4.75	\$1.10	34x4	\$7.95	\$2.25
30x3	4.65	1.30	32x4	8.75	2.40
32x3 1/2	8.65	1.40	34x4 1/2	9.00	2.50
32x3 1/2	6.20	1.80	36x4 1/2	9.15	2.60
34x4	7.00	1.60	38x4 1/2	9.35	2.70
32x4	7.40	1.85	36x5	9.65	2.80
33x4	7.70	2.15	37x5	9.85	2.80

ALL TIRES GUARANTEED FOR ONE YEAR. Pay on arrival. Examine before you pay and if not satisfied return at one expense. 50¢ per cent discount allowed when cash accompanies order. Specify whether straight side or clincher wanted. Order at once. Immediate shipment.

STANDARD TIRE & RUBBER CO.  
3270 S. Morgan St., Chicago, Illinois

### CHOICE \$1.49 14K GOLD-5

## WEDDING RINGS

SEND NO MONEY—Just choose the ring you want, A, B or C. Send your name, address and your size. Your ring will come by return mail.

A—Diamond, actually engraved with Orange Blossoms. C—Heavy Plain Narrow Yellow Gold English Oval Ring. B—Diamonds, Square, Engraved Bridal Wreath design. Newest and most fashionable Ring. If you order Rings A or B I will send you two pairs choice of Yellow Gold or the latest White Platinum finish. Unconditional 30-day Guarantee. Pay postage \$1.00 on arrival. Never lack if not satisfied. Ask Quik's Only limited number at this special price.

**ROE & ELDER**  
332 Plymouth Court Dept. 145, Chicago

# A New Novel Starts With Every Number!

\$4  
A YEAR

IS the subscription price for the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY—the best buy for the money in existence. This magazine appears on every newsstand in the United States Thurs-

day morning of every week. It contains the best selection of mystery, romance, love, adventure and humor produced in the English language. Nearly two hundred of the serials that appeared first in this magazine later appeared in book form and were sold at from \$1.00 to \$2.00 a copy. At the lowest estimate these stories, if bought in book form, would have cost a buyer not less than \$150.00. If you want to save \$146.00 per annum on books alone here is your opportunity. The income tax keeps us jumping, but there is another tax worse than that—the outgo tax. The former is fixed by the government. The latter is fixed by yourself. A word to the wise is sufficient.

52  
NOVELS

THIS means full-book-length stories all delivered into your hands in one year. If you prefer to buy the magazine weekly instead of subscribing in advance the price will be \$5.20—a simple problem in mathematics. Take your choice. The amount of money involved is little or nothing. Aside from the full-book-length novels you will receive 52 novelettes and not less than 400 short stories, up-to-date, well written, carefully selected, first class, smashing tales. The ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY is a clean magazine planned to please the whole family. No other fiction publication contains a higher standard of literary excellence. It is the best buy in popular fiction ever offered the American public. It is quite impossible for anyone to read four copies of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY and not become a steady reader.

# Argosy-Allstory Weekly

TEN CENTS A COPY

# Easy to Play—Easy to Pay

It is the one instrument that everyone can play—and it whose satisfies the longing body has to personally produce music. It is so perfected and simplified that it is the easiest of all musical instruments to master. You learn the scale in an hour's practice play popular music in a few weeks, and take your place in orchestra or band within 90 days, if you so desire. Saxophone players are always in demand in dance orchestras.

## BUESCHER

### True-Tone Saxophone

Nothing can take the place of the Saxophone for home entertainment, church, lodge, school. It increases the pleasure you get out of life, increases your popularity and your opportunities.

### Free Trial—Easy Payments

You may order any Buescher Saxophone, Cornet, Trumpet or Trombone or other Band or Orchestral Instrument without paying in advance, and try it six days in your own home without obligation. If perfectly satisfied, pay for it on easy payments to suit your convenience. Mention the instrument interested in and a complete catalog will be mailed free.

### Free Saxophone Book

After nearly 300 years' supremacy, string instruments are almost entirely displaced by Saxophones in all national popular orchestras. Our Free Saxophone Book tells which Saxophone takes violin, solo and bass parts, and many other things you would like to know. Ask for your copy.

**BUESCHER BAND INSTRUMENT CO.**

Makers of Everything in Band and Orchestra Instruments

3653 Buescher Block, Elkhart, Ind.



Buescher-Grand Trumpet

An entirely new model, featuring the Buescher insured new bore and new proportions. It will meet every demand, from the martial flourish to the tender love song. We guarantee it to be the best Trumpet you have ever heard.

Gene Rodemich

Director of Gene Rodemich's Orchestra. Hear this premier Southern Orchestra in Brunswick Records (for dancing), playing Buescher Instruments.



75%

of all popular saxophone records are played with Buescher Instruments.

## MAKE MONEY \$ AT HOME \$

YOU can earn from \$1 to \$2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new, simple "Instructograph" method. No canvassing or soliciting; we teach you how, guarantee you steady work at home no matter where you live, and pay you cash each week.

Full particulars and Booklet Free.  
AMERICAN SHOW CARD SCHOOL

202 Ryrie Building

Toronto, Can.

## "A Bride from the Sea"

A complete Novelette

By CAPT. A. E. DINGLE

Ten complete Short Stories and a variety of Verse—also installments of five Serials in

# MUNSEY

For

# November

ON SALE NOW AT ALL NEWS-STANDS—AT TWENTY-FIVE CENTS A COPY.

## DIAMONDS WATCHES

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Credit at Cash Prices



We import Diamonds direct from European markets and sell direct to you by mail. Our Diamonds are magnificent blue-white, perfect cut gems. Our immense BUYING POWER is a great saving to you. Why pay more than LOFTIS asks?

**SEND FOR CHRISTMAS CATALOG**

Over 200 illustrations of beautiful set Jewelry, Watches, Rings, always be remembered. There is something appropriate for everyone. Select at many articles as you wish and have all charged in one account. Best prices for your Free Christmas Day Credit Terms. Catalogs include: Watches, Liberty Bonds Accepted.

**LOFTIS**  
BROS. & CO. 1852  
THE OLD RELIABLE ORIGINAL CREDIT JEWELERS  
Dist. F-139  
100 N. State Street, Chicago, Ill.  
Stores in Leading Cities

# Win \$5,000

## \$10,000 Bank Guarantee

Producers and Consumers Bank  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

To the Public:  
E. J. Reefer has deposited \$10,000 in this bank to be used in awarding all the prizes in the "C" letter contest.

This Bank guarantees that no part of this \$10,000 will be used for any purpose until all the prizes have been paid by E. J. Reefer.

Very truly yours,  
PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS BANK  
By Neil S. Bowers, Treasurer.



**Sam Ross Did!**

19 year old Samie Ross, Hackensack, N. J., who won \$5,000 in a former Reefer Contest.

**Mrs. Young Got \$5,000**



Mrs. B. R. Young, of Girard, Pa., another winner of a \$5000 Reefer Contest Prize.

**How Many Objects in This Picture Can You Find Beginning with the Letter "C"**  
There is Cap, Cornet, Cane. How many more can you find? Write them down and send them in as soon as possible. See how easy it is. Everything is in plain sight. No need to turn picture upside down. This is a game of skill. Effort and perseverance will win.

## Costs Nothing to Try!

If you send in your list of "C" words and the judges decide your list is the largest which correctly names the visible objects beginning with "C", they will award you first prize in whatever column you qualify. If your list is second best list, they will award you one of the second prizes, etc. Get started right now.

## Win the \$5000

You don't have to buy anything to win a prize in this contest. If you have bought nothing, first prize is \$5. If you send in a \$1 order for either Washing Tablets or "More Eggs" Tonic, and win first prize, you get \$250. If you send in a \$2 order, first prize is \$500. But if you send in a \$5 order, for either product and your list is judged best, you win \$5000. Study the Prize List. See, there are 25 other prizes. Every prize in every column will be awarded. 40 in all, totaling \$10,000 will be paid.

## \$10,000 in Prizes!

	If no order is sent	If a \$1 order is sent	If a \$2 order is sent	If a \$5 order is sent
1st prizes	\$50	\$250	\$500	\$5000
2nd prizes	35	100	250	1250
3rd prizes	30	60	125	500
4th prizes	25	50	75	375
5th prizes	15	35	50	250
6th to 10th prizes, each	10	25	40	100

Every prize in every column will be awarded. 40 prizes in all, totaling \$10,000 will be paid.



**LARGE PICTURE SENT ON REQUEST FREE**

## Observe These Rules

- 1.-Any one excepting our employees and their relatives may enter this contest. There is no entrance fee of any kind.
- 2.-All word lists must be received through the mail by E. J. Reefer, 5th & Spruce Sts., Philadelphia, Pa., and all orders must be postmarked by post office closing time, February 10, 1925.
- 3.-Contestants who have sent lists or orders before February 10th will be qualified for the higher prizes provided orders are received through the mail, postmarked on or before February 25th.
- 4.-Only English words will be counted. Obscure, phantasied or compound words will not be counted. Only the singular of the plural of a word may be used, but both singular and plural will not count. Each article or object may be given only one name. Single words made up of two or more words or abbreviations will not count. Spoken, slang, or technical words will not count. Webster's International Dictionary will be the final authority. Where several synonyms are equally applicable to an object shown in the picture, a correct submission of any one of such synonyms will be given credit for one word only.
- 5.-The lowest list of words which correctly name visible objects beginning with the letter "C" will receive first prize, and an order down the list of prizes. The winning list will be made up from among the words submitted by any contestant and not restricted by any predetermined list of words, selected by the judges as being the "correct" or "master" list.
- 6.-For each wrong word a percentage will be deducted from the total number of correct words.
- 7.-Two or more people may co-operate in answering the puzzle. However, only one prize will be given to any one household or any one group.
- 8.-You must use only one side of paper. You must number each page and submit in a consecutive order. Your full name and address must be written on each page in the upper right hand corner. An enlarged picture will be furnished free upon request.
- 9.-The final decision will be made by three judges entirely independent of and having no connection whatsoever with the E. J. Reefer Company. They will judge the answers submitted and award the prizes at the end of the contest. Each participant entering this contest agrees to accept the decision of the judges as final and conclusive, without recourse or reservation. All answers will receive full consideration, whether or not merchandise is purchased. All the close of the contest, when all lists have been graded, the list winning first prize and the names of the writers, winners will be published, and a copy of each list and prize money, and the address will be sent upon request to any participant who sends in a self-addressed stamped envelope.
- 10.-An additional prize of not over \$500 for promptness, as specified above, will be awarded.
- 11.-In case of tie for any prize offered, such tying contestant will receive full amount of the prize so tied for.

## \$600 Extra for Promptness!

Your word list may be mailed any time up to February 15th, but every day before February 15th that your order is received, a special prize of \$10 for each day (not exceeding \$600) will be added if you win the \$5000 prize. Send order today and word list later.

**Goods You Get** Either one of these products may be ordered to qualify in this contest, but combination orders will not be accepted.

**Washing Tablets** Take all the back-breaking work out of washing. Just use one tablet to a tub of water. Results will delight you. So simple and easy! Rubs at the same time it cleanses. No wear on the delicate garments. Durable clothes come out whiter than before, with only 15 minutes work. No boiling. No tending.

Family size \$1 Economy size \$2 Jumbo size, same as large \$5, prepack.

**"More Eggs" Tonic** A scientific poultry tonic already used by half a million poultry raisers to increase egg production in Fall and Winter. Wonderful results produced. Two \$1.00 pkgs. \$1 Five \$1.00 pkgs. \$2 Economy size, or \$5 prepack.

Everyone, sending for a large size picture will receive, fully prepaid, sample package of a world famous, exquisitely scented, high-priced Complexion Powder. Send for it.

**E. J. Reefer, Dept. 2279 Philadelphia, Pa.**

No goods bought during this contest are subject to exchange, refund, approval or C. O. D.

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

Instantly, a low minor whistle cut the stillness, and he felt himself enveloped, mantled, choked by the perfume of roses.

He turned, looked, and leapt full at the face of—

But you must read this daring, unforgettable story for yourself. read it in these wonderful books—

By SAX ROHMER

This is the first time these complete sets have been offered in a uniform edition and, through a fortunate purchase of paper and other materials made at just the psychological moment, we are enabled to make for a short time a *very special offer*.

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We have on hand a few sets of those marvelous books—"The True Stories of Celebrated Crimes" which we are offering, *while they last*, as a premium for promptness to the first purchasers of Sax Rohmer.

Here are hundreds of pages teeming with excitement—amazing adventures of notorious Robbers, Assassins, Forgers and Smugglers—actual exploits of world-renowned Detectives, Secret Service Men and Government Agents—all the more thrilling because they are *absolutely true*.

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 elaborated crimes of history, compiled by famous writers of  
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 the U. S. Secret Service—Inspector Thomas Wynne, Trepoff  
 of the Imperial Russian Police—Frosal, Superintendent of  
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 Agents of the U. S. Government.

These names only hint at the mystery, the intrigue, the thrills awaiting you in the 3 big volumes of the most extraordinary detective stories ever written.

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